

30 YEARS OF ACOUSTIC GUITAR SPECIAL ISSUE

# ACOUSTIC GUITAR

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2020 | ACOUSTICGUITAR.COM

## OUR 30TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

### LESSONS

FINGERSTYLE  
BLUES

JAZZ  
COMPING

ALTERNATE  
TUNINGS

SMOOTH  
ARPEGGIOS

### GEAR

30 YEARS  
OF GUITAR  
INNOVATIONS

IS ONE  
GUITAR  
ENOUGH?

## 7 SONGS TO PLAY

THE BEATLES  
BLACKBIRD

BIG BILL BROONZY  
BABY, PLEASE DON'T GO

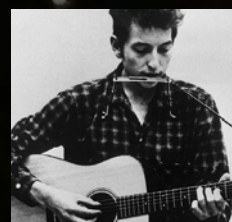
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BIG YELLOW TAXI

TONY RICE  
HOUSE OF THE  
RISING SUN

AND MORE

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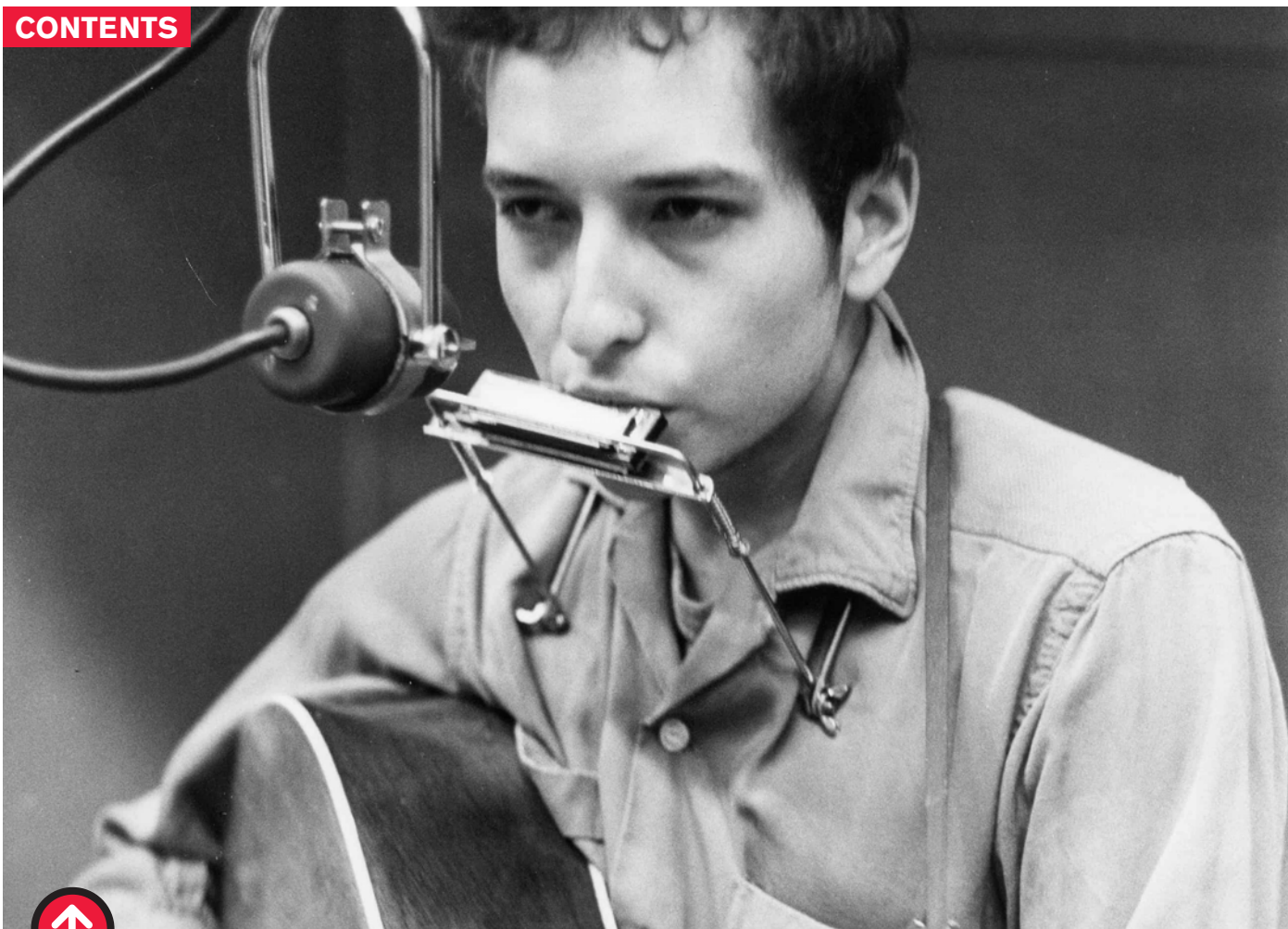
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**If you take the time to really check out what Dylan's playing behind his broadsides and ballads, you may be shocked by the nuances his hands are capable of.**  
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**September/October 2020**

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Elizabeth Cotten

**Photographer**

Johsel Namkung



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AN INTRODUCTION TO CSUS2 TUNING

## GO BEYOND DADGAD!



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## Video Exclusives



### 5 TIPS ON PLAYING ARPEGGIOS

Gretchen Menn demonstrates how to play broken chords smoothly. (p. 62)



### PLAY LIKE BOB DYLAN

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Happy Traum teaches a cool multipurpose lick. (p. 58)



### ALTERNATE TUNING

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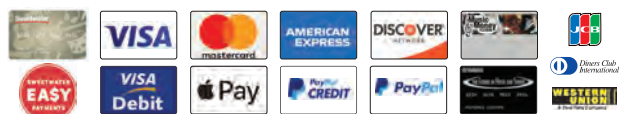
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## THE FRONT PORCH

Tom Prasada-Rao



COURTESY OF TOM PRASADA-RAO

With 30 years' worth of great material to choose from, putting together the special collection of archival features you're holding was a bit daunting at first. But as my colleagues and I went down many rabbit holes in browsing *Acoustic Guitar's* 323 issues to date, the idea of focusing on guitar heroes emerged—and with it some obvious choices. We zeroed in on classic 1990s interviews with some of the most beloved players, like Doc Watson, Chet Atkins, and Joni Mitchell, representing a good assortment of stylistic and technical approaches to the acoustic guitar.

The amount of notation in AG, whether songs or lessons, has varied over the years, but the magazine has always been about playing the instrument, and so it felt important to include a good sampling in this issue. Our in-the-style-of lesson features have been among the most popular, and Adam Levy's Bob Dylan piece, in which Levy elucidates the acoustic guitar parts on a bunch of classic Dylan tracks, was prime for the issue. We also dug up some terrific lessons from our Weekly Workout and Basics departments.

Then there was the issue of putting together the song list. Previous reader surveys made classics like The Beatles' "Blackbird" and Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi" no-brainers, but it was difficult to whittle down a long list of other candidates. AG has always given consideration to all styles, so in the end we went for big contrasts—for example, also including Teja Gerken's cool DADGAD arrangement of J.S. Bach's "Minuet in D Minor" and Tony Rice's jazzy flatpicking reading of "House of the Rising Sun."

For gear coverage, we have boatloads of reviews in the archives. But rather than

reprinting our initial impressions of now-classic instruments, we decided to instead include an overview of the staggering ways in which gear has evolved in the last 30 years, enlisting regular contributor Doug Young to write that feature. The issue closes with our perennially popular Great Acoustics page, this one showcasing a rare and lavish 1930 Martin 000-45 Deluxe that represents the pinnacle of the first golden era of American guitar making.

As we finally began to firm up the contents, a wave of protests spread around the United States—and the world—in the wake of George Floyd's senseless murder. No sooner did my fellow editors and I wonder what kind of songs might emerge from this tragedy than an especially striking one surfaced in our social media feeds.

Tom Prasada-Rao's "\$20 Bill (for George Floyd)" had already been covered a dozen times when we first heard the song, but by the time we first ran the notation on AG's website several days later, there were more than 100 different versions by musicians of all stripes. Prasada-Rao's original solo rendition, which he plays on a beat-up old Gibson tenor, felt like an instant classic, and an unflinching reflection of the turbulent world outside of the acoustic guitar bubble on the magazine's 30th anniversary. That's why we decided to include a chord chart (see page 12) along with the other timeless tunes collected here.

I hope that you'll enjoy the contents of this unique archival issue. As always, feel free to share your thoughts on the magazine or anything acoustic guitar.

—Adam Perlmutter

[Adam.Perlmutter@Stringletter.com](mailto:Adam.Perlmutter@Stringletter.com)





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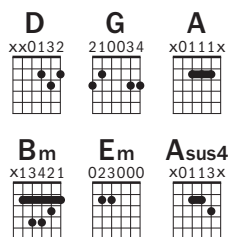
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## \$20 BILL (FOR GEORGE FLOYD)

**WORDS AND MUSIC BY TOM PRASADA-RAO**

### \*Chords



\*Capo I to match original recording.

## Strumming Pattern

[illegible]

1. Some people die for honor
- Some people die for love
- Some people die while singing
- To the heavens above
- Some people die believing
- In the cross on Calvary's hill
- And some people die
- In the blink of an eye
- For a twenty-dollar bill

## Interlude

**D G D A (x2)**

2. **D** Some people go out in glory **G** **D**
- G** Yeah with the wind at their back **D**
- G** Some people get to tell their own story **D**
- A**  
Write their own epitaph
- D** **G** **D**  
Sometimes you see it coming
- G** **D**  
Sometimes you won't know until
- G**  
You run out of breath
- D**  
With a knee on your neck
- A** **D** **G** **D**  
For a twenty-dollar bill

Bridge

**Bm**      **G**                      **D**  
Brother, I never knew you

**Bm      G                      D**  
And now I never will

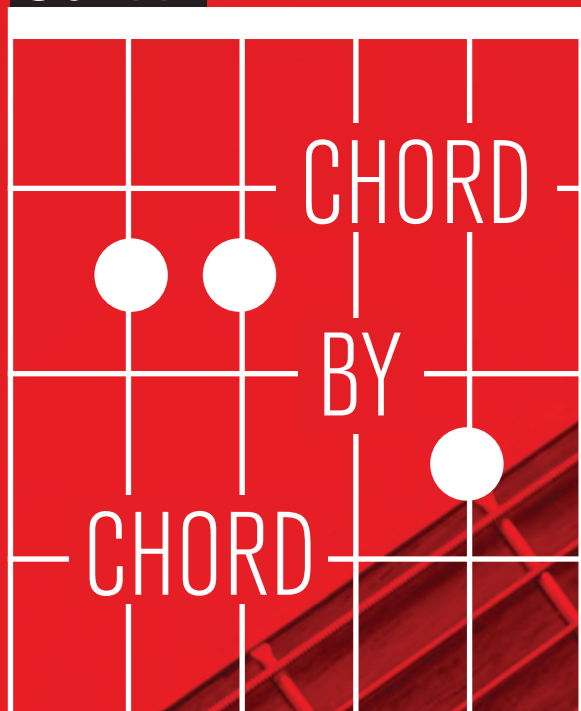
**Bm G Em D A G**  
But I make this promise to you

**Asus4 A**  
I'll remember you still

3. So now let this be a communion
- G** **D**  
It's time to break the bread
- G** **D**  
Do this in remembrance
- A**  
Just like the good book said
- D** **G** **D**  
Sometimes the wine is a sacrament
- G** **D**  
Sometimes the blood is just spilled
- G**  
Sometimes the law
- D**  
Is the devil's last straw
- A** **Bm** **G** **A**  
The future unfulfilled
- Bm** **G** **A**  
Like the dream they killed
- D**  
For a twenty-dollar bill



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Donald Kanke	J E Dobson	Joselph Guido	Mitchell Fritz	Robert Zawistowski	Winston Read
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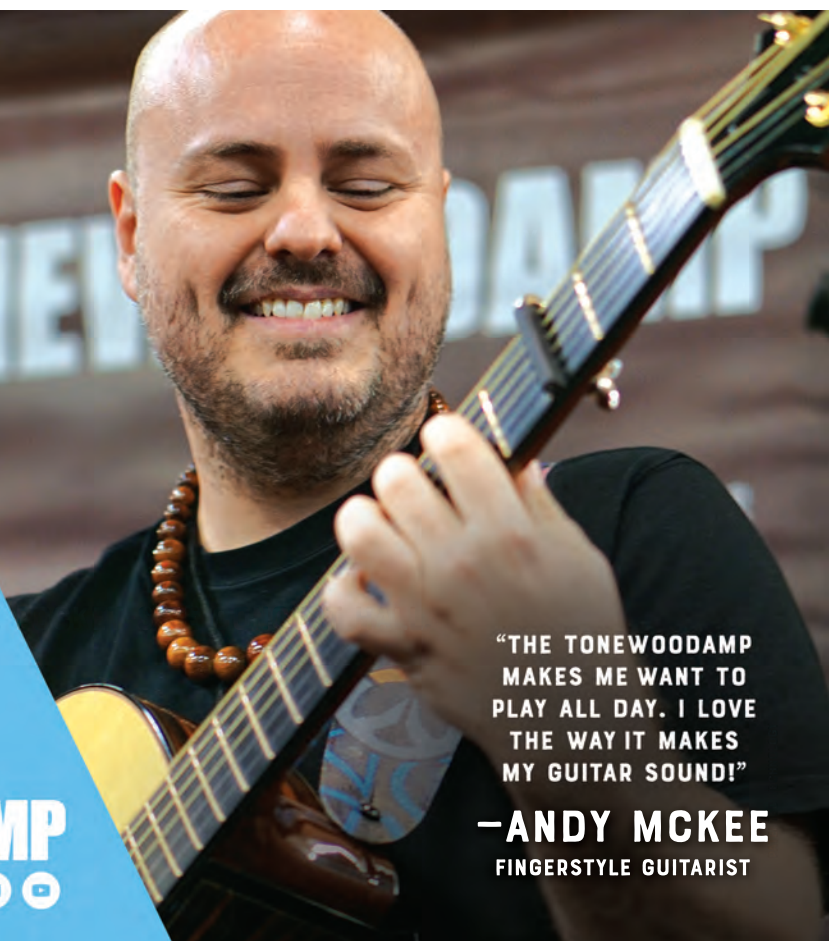
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# PLAY IT AGAIN . . .

In the July/August issue, we asked readers to tell us about the songs they never get tired of playing. Here are some of the responses.

I never get tired of playing “My Creole Belle” by Mississippi John Hurt. I play it fingerstyle like MJH. While on the surface the song seems rather basic with its C, F, and G chords, there are endless ways to embellish it using your pinkie finger, hammer-ons, pull-offs, and bends. There are also endless ways to create your own lyrics. I’ve been playing this song for years and will enjoy it for years to come.

—Bob Lang, Starksboro, VT

A song I never get tired of playing is “Canon in D” by Johann Pachelbel. It’s such a beautiful, moving piece. The music was in the August 2018 issue of *Acoustic Guitar*, and I have been working on it on and off for almost two years. I hope eventually I will get it right.

—Rosemary J Lambin, Chicago, IL

When I first started playing guitar, one of the first fingerstyle songs that I learned was “Wish You Were Here” by Pink Floyd, and since that moment, it has never lost its appeal. The combination of strumming and picking just creates a beautiful sound and feel that is both fun and simple to play.

—Dillon Hack, via email

I have been playing guitar for a long time, and I have lots of favorite songs I like to play. Among my favorite singer-songwriters are Jim Croce, Cat Stevens, John Denver, and Steve Stills. But my all-time favorite is James Taylor. I first learned “Fire and Rain” in about 1972, and I have been playing it ever since. That’s almost 50 years! I guess that qualifies as a song I never tire of playing.

—Rob Gronner, Erlanger, KY

Muriel Anderson’s “Always on My Way Home.” I love to play it and my listeners always respond most positively to it.

—Don MacKay, via email

Frustration at trying to take my playing to the next level always results in a return to Dylan’s “Buckets of Rain” in open D. Relatively straightforward two-finger positions and such a pretty tune are a great antidote!

—Jamie Etherington, Ellinbank, Victoria, Australia

I’ve played (not too well) “Victory Rag” a million times and still play it practically every



Tommy Emmanuel

ALYSSA GAFKJEN

day. I love it—and it still challenges me. Thanks for many years of great reading and learning. Keep it up and keep ‘em in tune!

—Edward Phifer, Morganton, NC

At the age of 55, I bought a used Martin OMC-18E. One of the first songs I learned—and one I never get tired of playing—is “Yellow Coat” by Steve Goodman. Every time I play it (gotta be a thousand times by now) I experience a different emotion. Beautiful song, easily standing the test of time.

—Mark Perron, via email

I never get tired of playing Tom Paxton’s “Bottle of Wine.” Three simple chords, easy to play, great lyrics, funny and true, perfect melody that entwines with the lines. Excellent descending verse melody that’s great for barre chords coming down the fretboard. Playing/singing the chorus is like swinging in a hammock, easy and natural. Easy three-note intro from the verse to the chorus. Inspiring finger practice!

—David Motley, Moneta, VA

“Drivetime” by Tommy Emmanuel, because it’s a fantastic fingerstyle composition and it took a boatload of time and effort to learn. Also “Fire and Rain” by my homeboy J.T. The perfect singer-songwriter tune!

—John Sheehan, Lenox, MA

The song I never get tired of playing is “Just an Angel.” It’s an acoustic guitar instrumental that I wrote several years ago in honor of my dog Riff. Riff and my wife love the song and I play it almost daily. I became disabled a few years ago and Riff went into training and became my service dog. Riff is a German Shepherd/Airedale mix and he’s just an angel to me.

—Kevin Brown, Wichita, KS

**My answer is “Shady Grove.” No other tune touches it for that mournful, mysterious, ancient folkie vibe.**

—Lars Kongsheim, via email

Neil Young’s “Out on the Weekend.” (And not just because I’m Canadian!) The “room” in that song to alter each version I play and the



Neil Young



HENRY DILTZ

gorgeous, dramatic chord changes quietly please me. Every time.

—Brian Hayes, Canmore, Alberta, Canada

Pat Metheny's "Last Train Home" (acoustic). It's one of those melodies that just keeps rolling along.

—Bob Parrish, via email

### THE REAL DEAL

I want to thank you for the great introductory article on Antoine Boyer in the March/April issue. After reading the interview I checked out some of his videos and Boyer is a great talent. At the comparatively young age of 24 he shows a graceful mastery of the Gypsy jazz genre as well as classical guitar. Whether playing in a group or solo, Boyer is amazing and a real inspiration to other guitarists. My only question . . . why isn't he on the cover?

—Mike Rusk, Tulsa, OK

### ENGLISH BLUES

Your March/April editor's note reminded me of a meeting that revealed to me one of the differences between American and English guitar players. Back in the mid-'60s, I lived near Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and worked part time in a clothing shop called Krackerjacks, which sold "mod" clothes. Lots of musicians stopped in and, as a budding guitar player, meeting them was pretty cool. One day, a guy came in with a stack of records under his arm and laid them on the counter while he looked around the store. I looked through the pile and we chatted for a while. He was from England, where records of American country blues artists like Mississippi John Hurt, Robert Johnson, Furry Lewis, and John Lee Hooker were just simply unavailable. But the music store a few doors down had lots of them. We had a nice visit talking about music

and he mentioned that his band was playing that night in town. I asked the name, he said Cream, and that his name was Eric Clapton. Pretty cool, huh?

—Pete Conlon, via email

### OH SHENANDOAH

What a great arrangement of a classic ["Oh Shenandoah," July/August 2020]. The unique chord choices and shapes create an enriched tone, and Maurice Tani shows a nice finger-picking pattern. However, using a flatpick, one can give a strong pluck to the bass notes and then do an arpeggio of the strings in the chord shape. The straightforward tabs also work well with the flatpick for an intro and outro. It is a fun addition to one's repertoire.

—Steve McCombs, via email

### TRANSFORMATIVE TONES

It was so great to see Alex de Grassi on the cover of AG [July/August 2020], as he's the reason I got into lutherie. I first picked up electric guitar to shred. Then, when I was in high school, my dad was listening to a Windham Hill sampler and this insanely beautiful guitar composition came on. Of course it was de Grassi. I listened over and over and couldn't figure out what was happening, so I bought his tab book and discovered all these nonstandard tunings and just fell in love with the music—and the sound of his Lowden guitar. At the time, I lived in Iowa and there wasn't any way to check out a Lowden, but I finally came across one in Houston. I then became obsessed with learning everything I could about acoustic guitars, dropped out of college, moved to Phoenix to go to the Roberto-Venn School of Luthiery, and the rest is history—all because of de Grassi! My wife and I have flown all over to see him, and our daughter has had to endure my butchering of his pieces. All these years later, de Grassi is still magical to me.

—Steve Nall,

Director of Manufacturing, Collings Guitars

### THIS ISSUE'S QUESTION

Are there any accessories you can't play without? Send your responses by August 15 to Editors.AG@Stringletter.com.

### CORRECTION

In the July/August issue's Great Acoustics (page 98), Michael Gurian is mistakenly said to have retired from guitar making. Gurian in fact continues to build nylon- and steel-strings on a limited basis.

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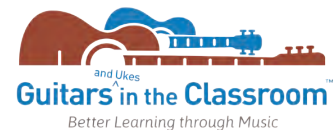
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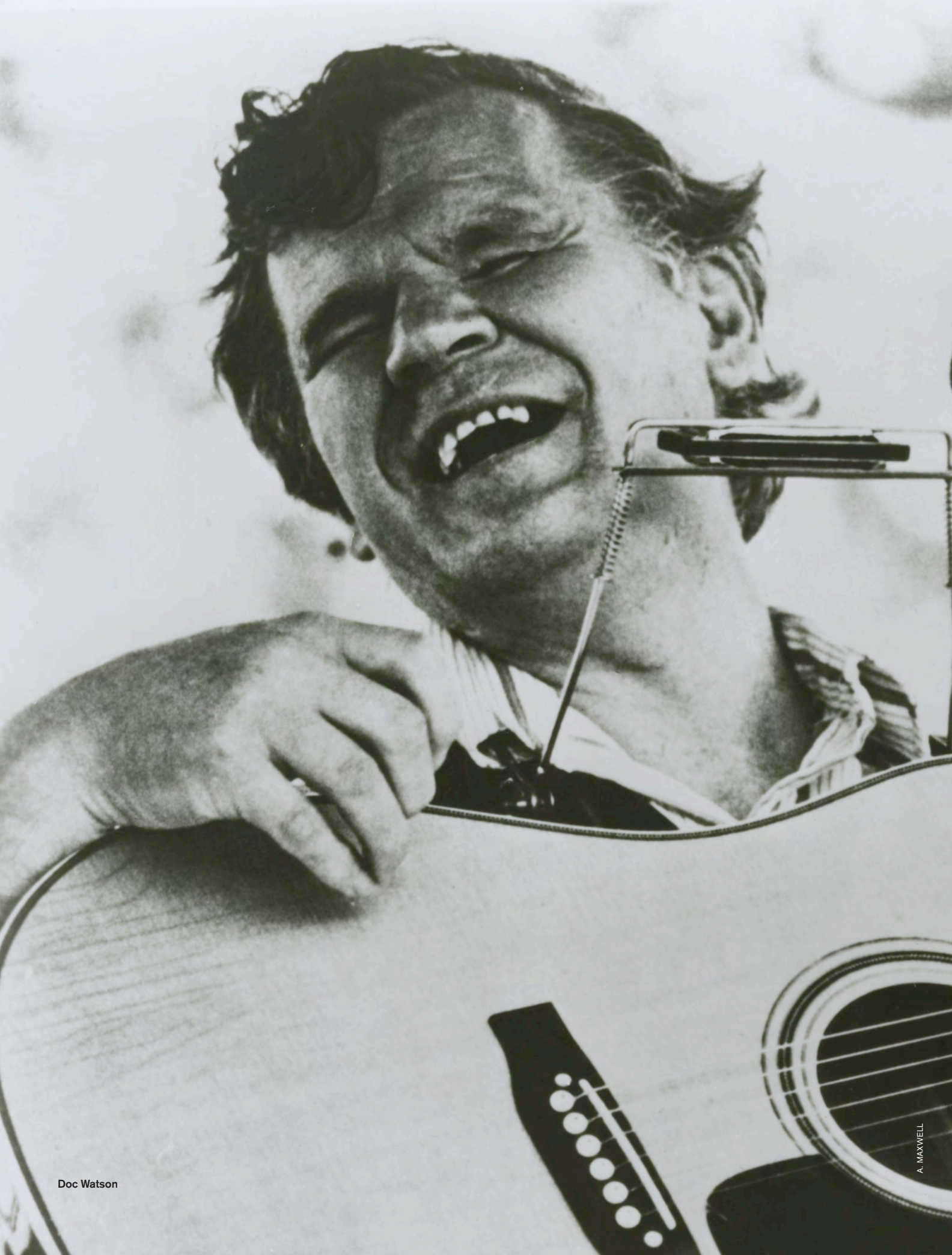
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Doc Watson

# FATHER AND SON

The rich musical legacy of Doc and Merle Watson

BY STEPHANIE P. LEDGIN

**F**or more than three decades, Arthel “Doc” Watson has been America’s most renowned and influential folk guitar stylist. Now about to turn 70, he’s mostly retired, staying off the road except for a half dozen dates a year. In a series of interviews last year, Watson reflected on his bittersweet career, shedding light on the development of his unique style and on the legacy of his late son, Merle, his performing partner for many years.

At any given Doc Watson performance, one will see and hear not only a guitar player of the finest caliber, but also an intelligent, witty, down-to-earth gentleman who loves to share the music of his heart and home. Watson is an extraordinary entertainer who never fails to capture the admiration and affection of his audience. His concerts are filled with hot flat-picking tunes, slow romantic ballads, gutsy blues numbers, and delicately fingerpicked melodies. Each song is sung with unmatched clarity, each tune played with a dexterity that has placed Doc Watson’s name in the music history books.

Watson did not set out to become a famous musician. In fact, if given his druthers, he never would have struck out on the road to make a living as a performer. While music would have been a part of his life no matter what, carpentry, electrical work, mechanics, or even engineering would have been Watson’s calling of choice . . . if given that choice. But a childhood infection took Watson’s vision by the time he was one year old.

Born into a musical family on March 3, 1923, in Deep Gap, North Carolina, Doc Watson refers to his blindness only as a hindrance, not as a disability. But he adds quietly that he regrets not being able to see the smiles on the faces of his loved ones.

It’s those loved ones who instilled in Watson the traditional folk music of his native region.

As Watson puts it, “I cut my teeth on it. Mother used to sing a few of the old ballads, and Dad was a singing leader in the little church from the time I can remember. He played a bit of old-time banjo. I had a brother that could pick some old-time banjo, and there were folks that lived around there that played a bunch of the old-time music. I got a good bit of my repertoire first-hand from some of the old-timers—fiddle tunes, ballads. But a lot of it came from early 78 [rpm] recordings and early radio.”

Watson’s father, General Dixon Watson, provided his first instruments. “My very first instrument was a little harmonica,” he recalls. “It was like the one I was playing ‘Milk Cow Blues’ on out there [at the concert that evening]—the same type. I got one every Christmas as far back as I can remember. And sometimes if I was a good boy, I got one for my birthday, because I usually wore them out pretty quick as a kid or lost them somewhere!”

“The first stringed instrument I had was a little homemade banjo that Dad made for me when I was 11. Then my first guitar came along when I was about 13. Though it was my second [stringed instrument], it was my first love as an instrument.”

Watson recalls his earliest playing attempts. “Dad showed me a few tunes on the old five-string. It was a fretless, and it was very hard to play true notes on. Then the original Carter Family—Sarah and Maybelle—were the first guitar influence. The first thing I learned was the old Carter Family style, using a thumbpick



Excerpted from  
the March/April  
1993 issue of  
*Acoustic Guitar*



and a strum with the fingers. Maybelle Carter played the lead on the bass strings with her thumb and did the rhythmic strum with her fingers. Then Jimmie Rodgers came right along; that good full-strum sound he played with a thumb lead and a finger strum.”

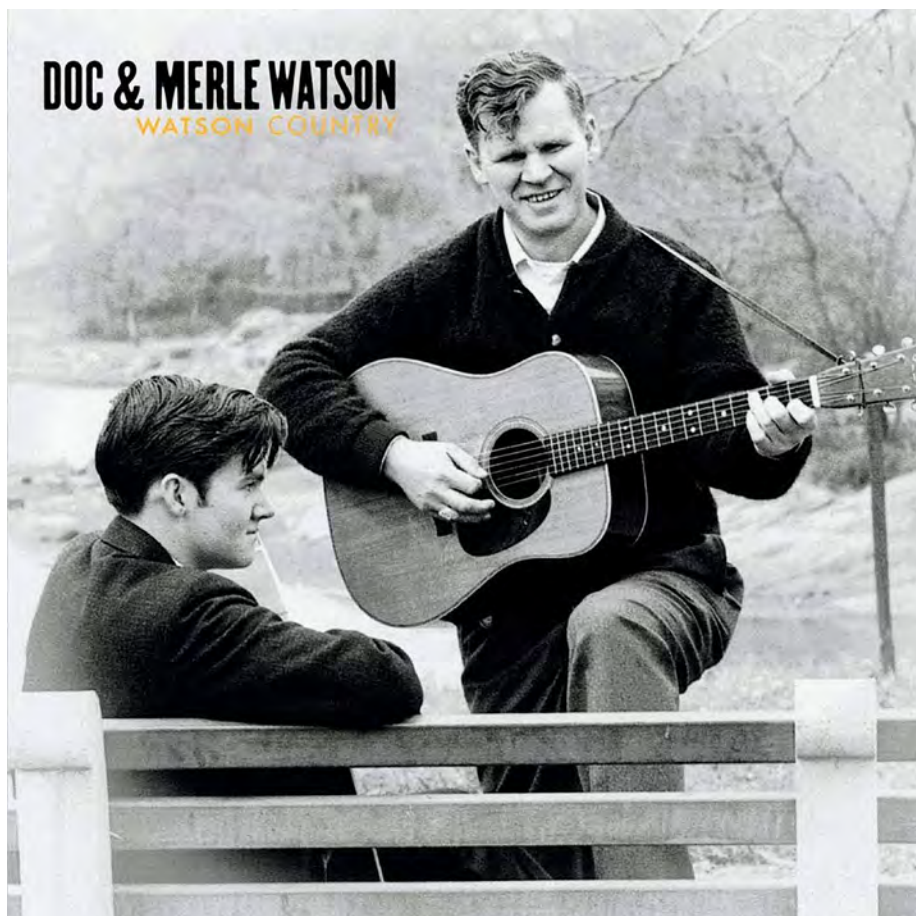
Watson continues, “Then I got into flatpicking. I ordered a guitar from Sears and Roebuck, and there came a book with it with different little songs in there that you could flatpick. It showed the old-time jazz guitarist Nick Lucas; it showed how he held his pick. My youngest brother, David, showed me how Lucas held his pick, and that’s how I learned to hold mine. But I figured out that if you’re going to play good flatpicking, you have to learn an even up-and-down stroke on the strings. That’s the first step in learning. But I never tried to do too much lead with the flatpick until I began to hear Hank Garland and Grady Martin. Hank was a jazz guitar player, but in the early days he played some country music up in Nashville with Red Foley and different people. I heard them play fiddle tunes and I thought, ‘By golly, if they can do that, I can.’

“I had to put in a little work on it. I learned a few things during the square dance and rockabilly days in the ’50s. Then, when I switched back over to the flattop in the early ’60s during the folk scare, as Michael [Coleman] calls it, I began to really work hard on the fiddle tunes, ’cause I found out people like ’em!”

Watson’s earliest influences were wide and varied, mainly introduced by the family’s “graphophone,” as they called their windup Victrola. He recalls his early experiences with blues: “There was a record or two by [Mississippi] John Hurt, Furry Lewis, some of the other blues artists. I think we had one with Skip James and the Memphis Jug Stompers. The blues were there; it was part of the background. And when Merle started on the road with me, he loved the blues, I think better than I did. We just naturally incorporated blues in the repertoire as we went along. It became a very big part of our sets. Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee furthered the cause as far as Merle and I were concerned. We learned a lot of songs from those boys. They were certainly a fine team.”

Not only did Watson come from a musical background, but he married into another family of music when he wed Rosa Lee Carlton, whose father, Gaither Carlton, was a fiddler with whom Watson played regional hymns and ballads. Doc and Rosa Lee Watson had two children, Eddie Merle, named after guitar great Merle Travis, and Nancy Ellen.

Watson had supported his family with his music since the early ’50s, playing in a country dance band on an electric Gibson Les Paul. All



the while he continued to play the traditional acoustic music of his home region with Tom “Clarence” Ashley, Clint Howard, and Fred Price.

It was while performing with Ashley, Howard, and Price at Union Grove, North Carolina, in 1960 that the now-legendary meeting of folklorist Ralph Rinzler and Doc Watson took place. Rinzler’s discovery of Watson led to Watson touring the coffeehouse circuit in the Northeast and eventually taking him to the stage of the Newport Folk Festival in 1963, where he was embraced enthusiastically by the folk community, young and old. That appearance and a historic concert with the father of bluegrass, Bill Monroe, at Town Hall in New York City in 1964 paved the way for Watson’s first recording contract.

That same year marked what was to be another momentous occasion. Upon returning home from a tour, Watson found that his son, Merle, had taken up the guitar. Rosa Lee had taught Merle his first chords, and Merle, as Watson says, “just took it and went with it.

“The first time Merle ever went to a festival with me was the Berkeley Folk Festival in 1964. He was 15. When he went on the stage with me, he had been pickin’ the guitar three

months, and he played backup guitar for me on the whole set. He met John Hurt on that trip and began to do a bunch of fingerstyle things, then things of his own notion, and picked up a couple of John’s tunes. I don’t remember how long it was before he began to really work on flatpicking, but he did it the way he thought it ought to be. If you’ve noticed his flatpicking style, it was a little different from mine. I taught him melodies of things that I’d want him to learn, but he’d get off in a corner and do it the way he wanted to; tunes like ‘Salt Creek’ or ‘Nancy Rowland,’ some of those old tunes.”

From a listener’s point of view, it was easy to distinguish which Watson was picking a particular break without actually seeing who it was, because the younger Watson so quickly developed his own distinctive sound.

In talking about his own playing, Watson often refers to “Doc style.” But one would be hard-pressed to place a precise definition on his guitar technique. “Doc style” is not just a picking method; it’s also his genuine, warm, down-home personality and his delivery. As Watson says, “Stage presence is everything, something some people are just lucky enough to be born with.”

Continuing about his style, Watson emphasizes, “As long as I’ve been picking professionally, I’ve been putting my own notions into the music. Whatever tune I play, I play the way I play it. I may have attempted to copy a few things when I first learned them, but very few things. I’ve purposely tried my best to copy every lick Smitty played on the early Ernest Tubb recordings. [Fay “Smitty” Smith was Tubb’s first electric lead player.] He was a jazz guitar player turned country. God, I loved his guitar picking! Whew, did I ever! Smitty didn’t do anything real fancy, they were just pretty little ripply licks, little triplets thrown in, a lot of them were just little pull-off rolls.”

Watson mentions a few other guitar inspirations. “For years, Chet [Atkins] was my idol. I finally figured out that I can’t play three-

As he slid out of a break, a beautiful, satisfied smile would come across his face.

His father’s performing and business partner for more than 20 years, Merle Watson played guitar, banjo, and slide guitar alongside his dad and produced most of their recordings. He recorded his first album with his father a mere eight months after strumming his first chord. They went on to record more than 20 albums together, winning four Grammy awards along the way. (Doc has since won two more.) Merle’s expertise on the guitar not only equaled that of the elder Watson, many in the

industry considered Merle to be an even finer picker. Merle’s life ended tragically in a tractor accident at his farm on October 23, 1985.

“Merle loved music,” Watson relates quietly. “He was an entertainer. Merle’s stage presence . . . well, just looking at Merle and that smile and knowing he was up there was half his presentation, and his music was the other half. I always thought that from what people said; I couldn’t see that, of course. He’d flash that smile and you knew he was up there!”

Doc Watson died on May 29, 2012, at 89. **AC**

**‘I heard them play fiddle tunes and I thought, “By golly, if they can do that, I can.”’**

– DOC WATSON

finger style or four-finger style like he does—literally, physically can’t do it. I don’t have the span, the reach that he has on the neck of the guitar. But I still love to hear the man play. Merle Travis, oh, God, I loved his music. The Delmore Brothers, um-um! I guess I liked every guitar player that I listened to, but there’s some at the top of the list, like Chet, Merle, Smitty, Hank Garland. I like George Benson pretty much. And my son, Merle, of course. He was the best slide player I ever heard in my life—I mean, Duane Allman and all the rest of them thrown in. Merle was the fastest, played the truest notes. And he was no slouch fingerstyle guitar player either. And Merle, as you noticed on the *Remembering Merle* CD, could flatpick when he wanted to.

“What impressed me the most about Merle’s guitar playing was the tasteful style that he had developed and his ability to learn very quickly,” Watson adds. “He was a much faster learner than I ever was. Those are the things that impressed me so much. He didn’t have to play 900 notes to make you like what he did,” he says, laughing, “if you’ll pardon a good healthy figure there!”

Merle Watson had a quiet but very visible presence. Onstage, the younger Watson would listen intently to the notes around him and respond with his own. He would often pick with his eyes closed and his head cocked down toward his guitar to hear better and concentrate on the crystal-clear notes he was picking.

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Eric Bibb

MICHEL VERLINDEN

# EXTENDED PLAY

Eric Bibb on merging the acoustic blues tradition with jazz influences

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

Several years ago, after playing a concert in London, the blues singer and guitarist Eric Bibb was approached by a fan with a battered old guitar case in hand. The case contained a gem of an instrument—the 1930s National guitar that the legendary Delta blues artist Booker White (better known as Bukka White), a cousin of B.B. King, played for decades on albums and tours throughout the United States and Europe. Bibb was wowed not just by the historical importance of the guitar, the bass side of which still had a handwritten set list taped to it, but by its superior sound. “Booker’s guitar had an incredibly rich, bell-like timbre, an unquantifiable sound far beyond just a good guitar tone,” he says. “The guitar resonated not as separate parts but as one piece; it felt a little otherworldly to play it.”

White’s guitar inspired Bibb to create *Booker’s Guitar*, his 17th solo album, on which he paid tribute to the Delta blues tradition in a

stripped-down setting—just guitar, voice, and harmonica. While Bibb used his own Fylde guitars on most of the album, he borrowed White’s guitar from its owner to record the album’s stark and haunting title track. “Having access to Booker’s guitar was kind of a talismanic thing,” says Bibb. “It signaled to me that I should make some new music from old acoustic blues materials and extend the tradition in my own style.”

As a teenager, Bibb spent a great deal of time in New York City’s Greenwich Village, where his father, Leon, was a singer on the folk scene. Bibb learned firsthand about music from such legends as Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan; the latter advised him to keep things simple on the guitar. At the same time, Bibb was exposed to jazz; his uncle was the pianist and composer John Lewis of the Modern Jazz Quartet. And when Bibb moved to Europe in his early 20s (he now lives in Sweden), he delved deeply into blues guitar as well as world music. All of these different strains can be

heard in Bibb’s modern style, which uses finger-picked Delta blues as a foundation. I recently sat down with Bibb in an apartment on the Upper West Side of New York City to learn more about the playing on his latest record and his use of unorthodox chords in blues music.

**Can you give an example of how the traditional acoustic blues repertoire guided your work on *Booker’s Guitar*?**

There’s a song on there called “Walkin’ Blues Again.” It’s a reworking of certain blues imagery, lyric-wise and guitar-wise. There’s a kind of



Excerpted from  
the September  
2010 issue of  
*Acoustic Guitar*

## Example 1

Tuning: D $\flat$  A $\flat$  D $\flat$  G $\flat$  B $\flat$  E $\flat$ , Capo III

D7

palm mute throughout  
on strings 5-6 (all examples)



walking riff in the guitar part that calls to mind many older songs. I've got my capo on the third fret, and my guitar is tuned to dropped D, down a half step, so while I play in the key of D, everything sounds in the key of E. The whole tune is just one main riff [bars 1–2 of **Example 1**] and a turnaround [bars 3–4].

**A number of your songs are built on a similar single-riff approach.**

"With My Maker I Am One," also on the new record, is typical of the approach I use for writing new blues tunes with repetitive modal riffs that can really keep something going rhythmically beneath the lyrics. Since there aren't a lot of changes, I try to use compelling riffs that aren't quite standard. This riff [**Example 2**] is based on a D5 shape. It ends up being kind of a contemporary field holler or work-song riff; it's almost like you have a gang of hammers coming down after the vocal line. The song has one turnaround—the V chord, A7sus4 [**Example 3**]. I love using a big, open V chord like that.

**It's not uncommon to hear chord sounds in your recordings that aren't exactly typical of**

**blues music. How did these harmonies find their way into your playing?**

At the same time that I was getting into country blues, I was studying classical and jazz guitar. From these experiences extended chords [those adding notes beyond the seventh] stayed in my mind and fingers, and I came to realize that I could use the chords in any style, as long as I did so sparingly and in the right moment. I never thought it was necessary to avoid extended chords just because traditional blues guitarists tended not to use them.

**Can you give an example of an extended chord in one of your songs?**

On my interpretation of "Come Back Baby," which I appropriated from a Dave Van Ronk arrangement, there is one interesting chord—a G triad with a C in the bass, also called Cmaj9. It's quite radical for a country blues setting, but it seems to work well. I play the song in A major, which sounds in A $\flat$  since I'm in standard tuning, down a half step. Here's the chord as it appears in the turnaround, preceded by the IV chord (D7/F#) and the iv minor (Dm/F) [**Example 4**]. It's great to have the unexpected sound of the iv minor in a major-key context.



**You've been known to unexpectedly use an extended chord to end a piece.**

Yes—here's a move fingered in the key of A major I sometimes use when ending "Don't Ever Let Nobody Drag Your Spirit Down" [**Example 5**]. It's got some jazzy 13th chords a half step apart and ends unexpectedly on the flat VI chord, Fmaj7, in this case containing the flat fifth. That's the kind of interval they used to crucify people for. I love that chord. **AG**

## NEW AND OLD SOUNDS

"I like finding an old gospel tune or spiritual that talks to me and rearranging it—setting it harmonically in a new space that doesn't

upset the tradition," Eric Bibb says. Here, Bibb adds a modern-sounding section to a more traditional melody in D.

**Tuning: D $\flat$  A $\flat$  D $\flat$  G $\flat$  B $\flat$  E $\flat$ , Capo II**

**E $m$ 11**

The musical notation shows a walking riff in the guitar part. The first system consists of four measures, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written on a single staff, and the guitar part is written on a six-string staff with a capo on the second fret. The piece is in the key of D major, but the guitar is tuned to D-flat major (D-flat, A-flat, D-flat, G-flat, B-flat, E-flat) to achieve a specific sound. The notation includes various chords and fingerings, with a final D5 chord indicated.



### Example 2

Tuning: D $\flat$  A $\flat$  D $\flat$  G $\flat$  B $\flat$  E $\flat$

D7

### Example 3

Tuning: D $\flat$  A $\flat$  D $\flat$  G $\flat$  B $\flat$  E $\flat$

Asus4 D

### Example 4

Tuning: E $\flat$  A $\flat$  D $\flat$  G $\flat$  B $\flat$  E $\flat$

D7/F# Dm/F A7

### Example 5

Tuning: D $\flat$  A $\flat$  D $\flat$  G $\flat$  B $\flat$  E $\flat$ , Capo II

B $\flat$ 13 A13 Fmaj7 $\flat$ 5





Chet Atkins



# COUNTRY CLASSIC

The acoustic inventions of Chet Atkins, certified guitar pioneer

BY JIM OHLSCHMIDT

**Y**ou can't learn what Chet Atkins knows about playing the guitar from a book or from his records. Any guitarist who has lifted one of Atkins' solos or some of his knuckle-busting moves from a tape and tab knows that while it's possible to play the notes correctly, getting them to sound like what Atkins plays is a different and more difficult challenge.

A self-taught virtuoso who learned his first licks on an old ukulele strung with wire pulled from a screen door, Atkins wanted nothing more from life—and settled for nothing less—than to be a world-famous instrumentalist. Now nearing 70, he looks back on a musical career that spans a half century and a discography as thick as a phone book. He's internationally known as one of America's greatest pop guitar stylists, as well as one of country music's most distinguished record producers, a remarkable combination that won him a Lifetime Achievement Award at this year's Grammys. But perhaps the biggest dividend of Atkins' lifelong investment in the guitar is that sound, the signature style embodying ideals of precision, invention, and expression that will continue to captivate listeners and challenge guitarists for years to come.

In many cases, Atkins' work on the acoustic guitar represents that sound at its best, although the acoustic side of his playing is often overshadowed by his association with Gretsch guitars in the 1950s and '60s, which brought him great renown as an electric guitar innovator. But listen to the pristine quality of his acoustic renderings of Don McLean's "Vincent" and Paul McCartney's "Junk," which are included on his most recent release, *The RCA Years* (1947–1981), a compilation of highlights from his lengthy tenure with that company. Better still, listen to any of the acoustic tracks from Atkins' quintessential *Alone* album: The smooth, melodic agility of "Hawaiian Slack Key" and the placid simplicity of "Just as I

Am" reveal the essence of Atkins' musical brilliance in a clear and unquestionable way.

Atkins graciously agreed to share his thoughts and recollections on his involvement with the acoustic guitar since he began his career in the late 1930s and early '40s. The following interview took place at his office on 17th Avenue in Nashville, where he remains a powerful, though quietly inconspicuous, mover and shaker in the business of country music. With an acoustic guitar propped against a nearby wall, Atkins sat at the table in his kitchenette and cradled a cup of hot decaf in his hands as he talked, reaching at intervals for his guitar to offer examples of his technique.

**What, in your opinion, are the most desirable qualities of an acoustic guitar, and why?**

The first thing I think of is that it's much less troublesome—you don't have to have an amp, you don't have to have a wire plugged in it and all that. I like to take an acoustic guitar and get in some room, like my kitchen or my back porch here at the office, and just play. It sounds so good.

I try to get in a room that reverberates a little bit. I've been doin' that since I was a kid. I used to take an acoustic guitar to school, and during recess I'd go to the boys' room. It was all tile, and the echo was great in there. In those days, people would record in churches to get echo—that's before they started adding echo electronically by putting a speaker in a live room and using a microphone to pick up the reverberation. But I'm gettin' off the track here.



Excerpted from  
the May/June  
1993 issue of  
*Acoustic Guitar*



My first meeting with the acoustic guitar was when I was real small, and I would plunk on it and hold my ear against the side and listen to it. It sounded so beautiful.

**Are there special qualities you look for in a steel-string guitar versus a nylon-string?**

I love both guitars, but I tend to play nylon most of the time because nylon is so much easier on my nails. When I play acoustic steel-string guitar, I don't play with just my nails like some people, because my nails aren't that strong. I play with the flesh on my fingers assisted by the nail. I get calluses on my fingers, but my nails are still long enough to scar on the side on steel strings, so I have to carry an emery board all the time to keep them smoothed out.

But nylon doesn't do that, especially the trebles, so that's the reason why I prefer to play nylon. That's also the reason why we developed the nylon electric, you know. I wanted something I could play onstage that didn't eat up my fingernails. It was kind of an accident, that guitar, but it solved that problem.

**When did you begin using a classical guitar on your own records?**

The first classic I played, I'm sure, was when I got that Estruch. That was on *The Other Chet Atkins* [1960]. That's the first one I remember.

**Do you think the commercial success of your records had something to do with increased interest in and demand for classical guitars?**

Probably not. There was Laurindo Almeida, who was recording earlier. He was in the jazz and pop field. I'm sure he had a bigger influence. I know he influenced me because I heard his records and just had to have a good classic guitar. And he told me he'd get me one once, but the price was so high that I didn't order it. I couldn't afford it at that time.

My very first records were done with an acoustic guitar—an L-10 Gibson that my brother had gotten from Les Paul and gave to me.

**In concert, you often switch from your electric guitar to the CE [Classical Electric] within your set. Many guitarists don't feel comfortable switching from steel strings to nylon strings, yet you seem to do it effortlessly.**

I have a [Gibson] Country Gentleman with a wide neck. It's almost as wide as a classical fingerboard. So when I change from the nylon-string guitar to the steel-string, it's not such a drastic change in fingerboard width. If it were a very narrow neck on the electric, like I used to play, I would have problems.



I remember when I thought a neck should be very, very narrow and small, so I could use my thumb and make all those chords. Then I finally realized that I was getting an awful lot of buzzes and mistakes because the strings were too close together. They'd vibrate and hit my nails. So now I like a wide neck, even on a steel-string guitar. Not too wide, 'cause I still use my thumb to make some chords, especially when I'm playing rhythm.

I've never seen a great rhythm guitar player who didn't use his thumb to make chords. There's just so much more strength there, and it gives you one-fifth more of an advantage. But that's just an opinion. Henry "Homer" Hanes was the greatest rhythm guitarist I've known. Boy, he could lay it down. He used his thumb. He had such a beat and he was really a swinger, like a metronome with feeling.

**Let's talk about some of your all-acoustic guitar records, as opposed to the records where you played both acoustic and electric guitar, or electric guitar only. One that immediately comes to mind is *Standard Brands with Lenny Breau* [1981].**

That record was done on the fly, and my part isn't very good because I was trying to keep Lenny out of the pills and out of the booze and everything, and I was engineering on most of it. [But] he did some of his greatest playing on that album. On "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" and "Sweet Georgia Brown" I just slapped my leg and let him play.

He played with all five fingers on his right hand, and some of those arpeggios and rolls he did I could never do because I've never learned to use my pinky finger on my right hand.

**Did Breau teach you the cascading harmonic arpeggio technique that you play on your arrangement of "When You Wish upon a Star" and other tunes, or did he learn it from you?**

I first played the arpeggiated harmonics on an arrangement of "White Christmas" and another tune I recorded on a Christmas album in 1961 [*Christmas with Chet Atkins*]. I'm sure that's where Lenny got and developed the idea, because I didn't meet him until 1967. He said he started getting into harmonics from hearing me play "Chinatown, My Chinatown."

The first harmonics I heard were on a Django Reinhardt record in about 1949 or 1950, and I learned to do that—just play single-string harmonics. But then I got to thinking about the steel players I had worked with who would pluck one harmonic and pluck the next string with their thumbpick, and it would invert the usual harmony that you would get if you plucked two strings.

I did that for quite a while, and then I got so I thought I could play a harmonic on the third string and then pluck the first string with my third finger, and I could play harmony. I did that a lot in the early '60s, and the arpeggios came soon afterward.

**Another standout acoustic guitar album in your discography is *Reflections with Doc Watson* [1980]. While there is a vast difference between your fingerpicking style and Doc's flatpicking style, you and Doc are closely linked by a common love of old-time musical repertoire.**

I had heard Doc's playing for several years, and I had met him a couple of times—I actually met him back when I played Kingsport [Tennessee] about 25, 30 years ago. Somebody brought him



to the show and introduced him to me. At the time he wasn't famous. Later on, of course, we'd do some work together here and there.

It was real easy to work with Doc on that album because I knew all the tunes that he knew. We're from about the same area of the country. He plays a lot of the old fiddle tunes that I heard from the cradle.

**What about that other great acoustic album, *The Atkins-Travis Traveling Show*, which earned you and Merle Travis a Grammy in 1974? It's interesting that although you and Merle both came to stardom as innovators on the electric guitar, you chose to make this record with acoustic guitars exclusively.**

Merle did play acoustic guitar a lot when he first started. His greatest album, and the one that brought him so much attention, was that great folk album [*Folk Songs of the Hills*, Capitol] from 1947 where he did "Sixteen Tons," "John Henry," and others. I think he was playing that Martin with the Bigsby neck. We were trying to duplicate that record, I guess. I don't know what I played on that album. I

never listen to it. It may have been one of Mr. [Hascall] Haile's guitars.

**One of the striking things about that record is that while it clearly shows the deep-rooted similarities in your respective playing styles, it also illuminates the vast differences in your approaches to soloing.**

I never tried to play like Merle. Somebody not too long ago sent me some stuff by Merle recorded off the air in California in 1946 and '47; along in there. And do you know what he did? He didn't play alternate basses like I play. He played two bass strings at once. Like, if he was in E, he'd play the E and the B note on the 1 and 3 beat, and he'd play the fourth and third string on the 2 and 4. And that's the reason that his playing sounds almost like he's playing a four-beat, rather than a 2/4. When you listen to me, you hear 2/4, because I'm playing alternate basses all the time.

You know, back then when I was learning to play, my influences were George Barnes and Les Paul and Merle Travis, and I'd play something and one of the other musicians [at a radio station or in a show] would say, "Yeah, Merle Travis," or "Les Paul," and it would make me just furious. I was determined to play my own way. I never listened to Merle after I was about 18 or 19 years old. I heard him when I was about 15 or 16. I never knew what he was doing and, fortunately, I never saw him play. I always tried to get my own thing going.

[Sometimes] I think, "Why have I been so successful?" and I can't figure it out. But then I might listen to one of my old performances and I think, "Maybe I did have something. Maybe no one else was doing it at that time. I was in the forefront, and maybe that's why I've done so well." But at the time it meant nothing. I thought it all stunk. I didn't like to hear myself play, and I still don't.

I've never been real famous—probably never will be. But I didn't follow the trends. I wanted to be known and respected as a musician, not just as a country musician. I've always valued compliments from my peers very highly, and it always means so much for somebody who's a good musician to tell you, "Boy, that's nice, what you did." That means more to me than 10,000 compliments from the public, because a good musician knows.

I remember I went up to Knoxville to one of [classical guitar great] Christopher Parkening's concerts—this was 15 or 20 years ago—and he said, "I was nervous out there." I said, "Why?" and he said, "Because you were out there." I said that it shouldn't make any difference, and he said, "It does, because you know." And that was quite a compliment to me. I consider him to be one of the best in the world.

*Chet Atkins died on June 30, 2001, at 77.* **AC**



# A TRUE ORIGINAL

Remembering folk icon Elizabeth Cotten and her distinctive guitar approach

BY LINDA DEMMERLE

**S**even years after the death of folk guitarist Elizabeth Cotten, her music is heard everywhere—from Peter, Paul and Mary to the Grateful Dead to movie soundtracks and even the jukebox band on PBS’ *Shining Time Station*. Cotten, who began her public career at the age of 68, became a key figure in the folk revival of the ’60s, a National Heritage Fellow, and a Grammy-winning recording artist. Turning her instruments upside-down to play them left-handed—so that she played the treble strings with her thumb and the bass strings with her other fingers—she developed a truly distinctive guitar style and sound. Her song “Freight Train” [see full transcription in the July 2017 issue —ed.] is a fingerpicker’s classic, and her arrangements of tunes like “Oh, Babe, It Ain’t No Lie” are staples of the folk repertoire.

Elizabeth Cotten was born into the Nevilles family on January 5, probably in 1891, near Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Her parents couldn’t agree on a name, so she was called “Little Sis,” “Babe,” and “Shug” until her first day of school, when she announced that her name was Elizabeth. At the age of seven, she would steal into her brother’s room while he was at work and play his homemade banjo. Broken strings betrayed her borrowing, but even though her brother complained about it, he never scolded her or forbade her to play the instrument. Cotten tried to learn with the banjo restrung for a left-handed player but eventually returned to her upside-down method and proceeded to learn on her own. Later, she delighted her audiences with her standard declaration, “Nobody did teach me. Everything I know, I learned all by myself, so I give myself all the credit!”

Soon, Cotten’s brother grew up and left home, taking his banjo with him. Desperate to get her hands on an instrument, Cotten went door to door looking for work. She earned enough money to buy her first guitar, a Stella. “From that day on, nobody had no peace in that house,” she would say with a laugh. Cotten mastered the guitar and at the tender age of 12 composed her most famous song, “Freight Train.” Influenced by the guitarists of the time, traveling musicians, medicine shows, minstrel

shows, and local musical styles, Cotten developed an extensive repertoire of standards, dance tunes, and rags. Her music included original compositions, instrumental and vocal tunes, and arrangements of others’ music.

Dana Klipp, her guitar accompanist in later years, explains, “Although influenced by others that she heard, Elizabeth herself was a true original source, going back to the turn of the century. She was a link to that authentic style. Being one of the discoveries during the folk boom of the 1950s, she was able to leave behind a great recorded document of her playing style.” Cotten’s music, he says, was “often labeled as blues but had more ragtime influence. . . . Her style of playing left-handed on a right-handed guitar was unique, producing a sound unlike anything a right-handed player could simulate. This technique gave her music a softer, almost classical sound. A combination of her unparalleled technique and her custom of using light strings contributed to her sound.”

Cotten married at 15 and eventually gave birth to her only child, Lillie. At this time in her life, Cotten added religious songs to her ever-increasing repertoire. The church was a great source of joy and comfort to her all of her life, but there was one hitch: The deacons of her church told her that she must give up her “worldly music.” After learning many church songs, as she called them, and finding that they were no substitute for the other music she loved, Cotten set aside her guitar aside for nearly 40 years.

Over the next few decades, Cotten often worked as a domestic in Chapel Hill, New York, and Washington, DC. Some time later, when she was earning her living selling dolls in Lansburgh’s [a chain of department stores in Washington, DC], she discovered a lost little girl, Peggy Seeger,



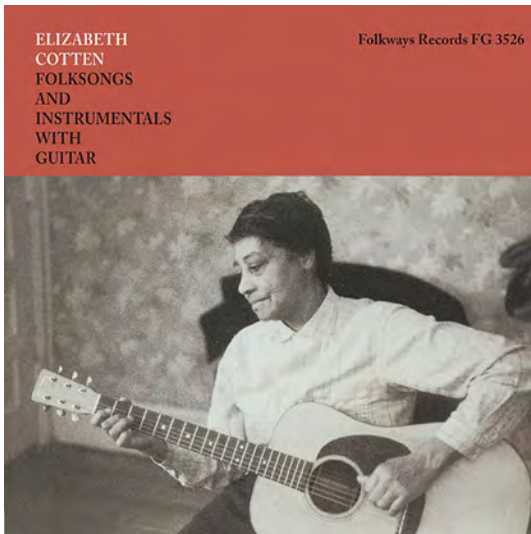
Excerpted from  
the February 1995  
issue of *Acoustic  
Guitar*











Cotten's 1950 Martin 000-18 and case, serial #114993



COURTESY OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

and returned her to her mother, Ruth Crawford Seeger. In gratitude, Seeger offered Cotten the job that proved to be the turning point of her life. From 1945 until the early '50s, Cotten kept her musical gifts to herself. Dana Klipp sets up the famous story:

"The Seegers were musicologists, and Ruth was already the author of a well-known children's songbook. The older brother, Pete, was probably already heavily entrenched. Elizabeth, who hadn't played music for years, picked up one of the guitars around the house."

"Peggy was learning to play," says Mike Seeger, "and it was Peggy who discovered Elizabeth playing." Cotten was in the right place at the right time, with a house full of musicians on fire for folk music, and the Seegers swept "Libba" (the Seegers' nickname for her) into their musical circle. As Klipp says, "She was the folklorist's dream: a true, authentic musician." Mike Seeger began recording Cotten in 1952 and produced her first album in 1957, now retitled *Freight Train and Other North Carolina Folk Songs and Tunes*. "Mike said that I was good enough to perform," Cotten said in an interview, and in 1960, at the age of 68, her public career was launched. Cotten and Seeger performed their first concerts at Swarthmore College and went on to play clubs and festivals. When Seeger later played with the New Lost City Ramblers, Cotten traveled with them.

"Freight Train" had become famous—but for all the wrong reasons. Peggy Seeger had gone to England in the mid-'50s and was performing Cotten's song. It was picked up and recorded by Nancy Whiskey, but credit for the song was taken by two men who persuaded Peggy to sing into their tape recorder. Confusion mounted when "Freight Train" became a hit in the United States for Rusty Draper. Cotten began hearing it on the radio and thought, "Hmmm." "Pete heard it," Mike Seeger says,

"interested a publisher, there were lawyers . . . Elizabeth was given one-third of the credit for 'Freight Train,' which she graciously accepted. Later, Peter, Paul and Mary recorded it, and Peter Yarrow called and asked to give full credit for the song to Elizabeth, even though they had added something. That was very nice."

In 1963, Cotten was on the bill at the first Philadelphia Folk Festival. From there, she played her own concerts, and in 1967, when she was in her mid-70s, she recorded *Elizabeth Cotten, Volume 2: Shake Sugaree*, followed by *Volume 3: When I'm Gone*. Cotten and Seeger continued to perform together, and at the age of 85, Cotten appeared with her family at the bicentennial activities in Washington, DC. In 1979, recordings of her concerts began to be compiled for *Elizabeth Cotten Live!*, which won the Grammy for Best Ethnic or Traditional Recording.

Cotten moved to Syracuse, New York, to be with her daughter, Lillie. Now in her 90s, her hands were becoming weak and she had trouble with the guitar. Klipp, a friend who was well acquainted with her style, began to play with her in 1984. Klipp had been arranging and composing with traditional folk artist Johnine Rankin, Cotten's granddaughter, and eventually the three of them evolved into a trio. Dan Ward, coordinator of folk-art study for the cultural resource council in Syracuse, describes their work. "Elizabeth was very spontaneous and audience-sensitive. No matter what Elizabeth did, Klipp picked it up and carried it, sometimes songs that he'd never heard that she was remembering from her childhood.

"Her picking was a fairly distinctive style that caught on during the folk revival of the '60s," Ward adds. "Dana was not hired just as a musician. Translating her upside-down, left-handed playing, he was a second pair of hands to her and is probably the carrier of her guitar style."

"I was an accompanist," Klipp explains. "Most of the time she would be playing and I would

softly play with her, just to strengthen the sound of the bass lines and give her some support.

"They were there to see *her*. They loved her, you know. She liked to talk to the audience, and they loved it. What impressed me was her gift of being able to project. It wasn't just her music; it was her entire personality and her spirituality. It was a very gentle and graceful spirituality, although she did used to say, 'You'd better get right with God.'

"She was pretty feisty, she had spirit; that's what kept her going. Her hands became a problem but she wanted to play—she *loved* to play. She seemed to feel she owed it to her fans, although it was difficult to believe that people would make such a fuss over her—the fact that she was doing something that came so naturally for her and that she enjoyed doing. She was very unselfish about it. It would have been easier for her to stay home, you know. It's not like there was anything left to do that she hadn't already done."

Cotten played her last Philadelphia Folk Festival in 1986 and her final concert, a tribute to her arranged by her peers at City College in Harlem, New York, on February 22, 1987. She died on June 29 of that same year.

"She was an inspiration," Klipp says. "She endured and overcame hardships to share her music. Here, she had gone so many years and given music up when it was the one thing she loved to do in life the most. She suffered righteous indignation that she would play 'that worldly music.' I think she decided that if she was playing the music she loved to play, it was by no means sinful." When asked if Cotten imparted any wisdom to him, Klipp laughs. "Yeah. She said, 'If you're up there playing, don't ever stop. Even if you make a mistake, keep on goin', 'cause no one will ever know!'"

*Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten died on June 29, 1987, at 94.* **AC**

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Joni Mitchell



# MY SECRET PLACE

The guitar-tuning odyssey of Joni Mitchell

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

**A**t the heart of the music of Joni Mitchell is a constant sense of surprise and discovery. The melodies and harmonies rarely unfold in ways that our ears, tamed by pop-music conventions, have come to expect. Her guitar doesn't really sound like a guitar: The treble strings become a cool-jazz horn section; the bass snaps out syncopations like a snare drum; the notes ring out in clusters that simply don't come out of a normal six-string. And her voice adds another layer of invention, extending the harmonic implications of the chords and coloring the melody with plainspoken commentary as well as charged poetic imagery.

Even though all these qualities have made Mitchell one of the most revered songwriters of our time, an inspiration for several generations of musicians, the creative processes and impulses behind her music have always been clouded in mystery. A guitarist haunted by Mitchell's playing on an album like *Court and Spark* or *Hejira*, for instance, can't find much help in the music store in exploring that sound; what she plays, from the way she tunes her strings to the way she strokes them with her right hand, is utterly off the chart of how most of us approach the guitar. The only published documentation of her 30-year guitar odyssey is four single-album songbooks transcribed by Joel Bernstein, her longtime guitar tech and musical/photographic archivist, which show the real tunings and chord shapes. But that's a very small slice of a career that spans 17 albums, each one a departure—often a radical one—from what came before. Remarkably, Mitchell herself relies on Bernstein's encyclopedic knowledge of her work—because she has forged ahead with new tunings throughout her career and rarely plays her past repertoire, Bernstein has at several junctures helped her relearn some of her older songs.

In the wake of her 1996 Grammy for Best Pop Album for *Turbulent Indigo*, which marked the stunning return of her acoustic guitar to center stage, Joni Mitchell met with me in Los Angeles to offer a rare, in-depth view into her craft as a guitarist and composer.

"There's a certain kind of restlessness that not many artists are cursed or blessed with, depending on how you look at it," Mitchell said. "Craving change, craving growth, seeing always room for improvement in your work." In that statement lies the key to her music: seeing it as an ongoing process of invention, rather than a series of discrete and final statements.

Joni Mitchell began playing the guitar like countless young musicians of the '60s, but she quickly turned onto a less-traveled path. "When I was learning to play guitar, I got Pete Seeger's *How to Play Folk-Style Guitar*," she recalled. "I went straight to the Cotten picking. Your thumb went from [imitates alternating-bass sound] the sixth string, fifth string, sixth string, fifth string . . . I couldn't do that, so I ended up playing mostly the sixth string, but banging it into the fifth string. So Elizabeth Cotten definitely is an influence; it's me not being able to play like her. If I could have I would have, but it's a good thing I couldn't, because it came out original."

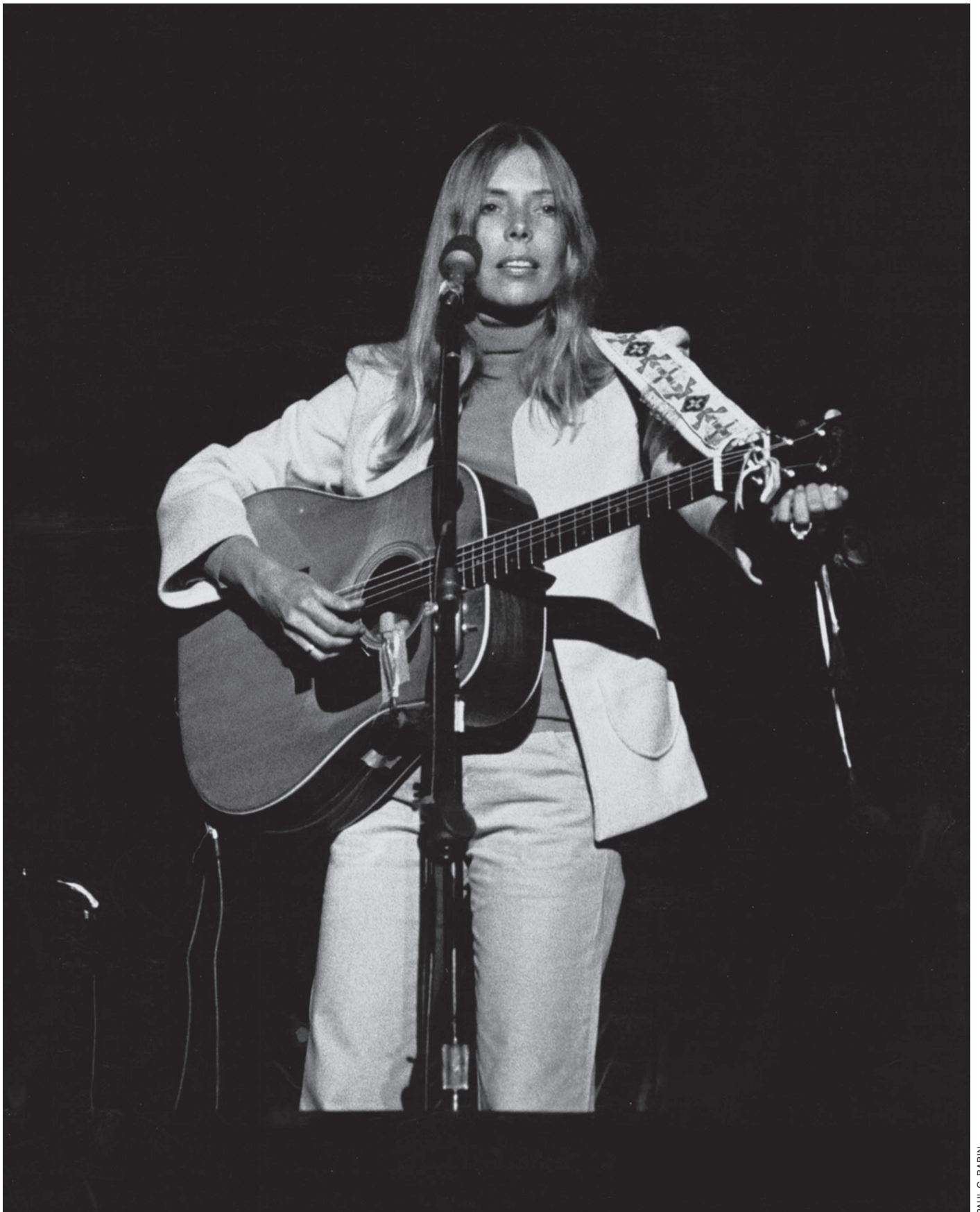
At the same time that she departed from standard folk fingerpicking, Mitchell departed from standard tuning as well (only two of her songs—"Tin Angel" and "Urge for Going"—are in standard tuning). "In the beginning, I built the repertoire of the open major tunings that the old black blues guys came up with," she said. "It was only three or four. The simplest one is D modal [D A D G B D]; Neil Young uses that a lot. And then open G [D G D G B D], with the fifth string removed, which is all Keith Richards plays in. And open D [D A D F# A D]. Then going between them I started to get more 'modern' chords, for lack of a better word." As she began to write songs in the mid-'60s, these tunings became inextricably tied to her composing.



Excerpted from the August 1996 issue of *Acoustic Guitar*



August 1974, Universal Amphitheatre, Los Angeles



PAUL C. BABIN

On Mitchell's first three albums, *Joni Mitchell* (1968), *Clouds* (1969), and *Ladies of the Canyon* (1970), conventional open tunings coexist with other tunings that stake out some new territory. "Both Sides, Now" (capo II) and "Big Yellow Taxi," for instance, are in open E (E B E G# B E—the same as open D but a whole step higher); and "The Circle Game" (capo IV) and "Marcie" are in open G. But it was more adventurous tunings, like C G D F C E ("Sisotowbell Lane"), with its complex chords created by simple fingerings, that enthralled her and became the foundation of her music from the early '70s on.

"Pure majors are like major colors; they evoke pure well-being," she said. "Anybody's life at this time has pure majors in it, given, but there's an element of tragedy. No matter what your disposition is, we are air breathers, and the rain forests coming down at the rate they are . . . there's just so much insanity afoot. We live in a dissonant world. Hawaiian [music], in the pure major—in paradise, that makes sense. But it doesn't make sense to make music in such a dissonant world that does not contain some dissonances."

The word *dissonances* seems to imply harsh or jarring sounds, but in fact the "modern chords" that Mitchell found in alternate tunings have an overall softness to them, with consonances and dissonances gently playing off each other. It's difficult to put a label on these sounds, but Mitchell is emphatic about one thing: They're a long way from folk music. "It's closer to Debussy and to classical composition, and it has its own harmonic movement which doesn't belong to any camp," she said. "It's not jazz, like people like to think. It has in common with jazz that the harmony is very wide, but there are laws to jazz chordal movement, and this is outside those laws for the most part."

So how does Mitchell discover the tunings and fingerings that create these expansive harmonies? Here's how she described the process: "You're twiddling and you find the tuning. Now the left hand has to learn where the chords are, because it's a whole new ballpark, right? So you're groping around, looking for where the chords are, using very simple shapes. Put it in a tuning and you've got four chords immediately—open, barre five, barre seven, and you higher octave, like half fingering on the 12th. Then you've got to find where the interesting colors are—that's the exciting part.

"Sometimes I'll tune to some piece of music and find [an open tuning] that way, sometimes I just find one going from one to another, and sometimes I'll tune to the environment. Like 'The Magdalene Laundries' [from *Turbulent*

*Indigo*; the tuning is B F# B E A E]: I tuned to the day in a certain place, taking the pitch of birdsongs and the general frequency sitting on a rock in that landscape."

Mitchell likens her use of continually changing tunings to sitting down at a typewriter on which the letters are rearranged each day. It's inevitable that you get lost and type some gibberish, and those mistakes are actually the main reason to use this system in the first place. "If you're only working off what you know, then you can't grow," she said. "It's only through error that discovery is made, and in order to discover you have to set up some sort of situation with a random element—a strange attractor, using contemporary physics terms. The more I can surprise myself, the more I'll stay in this business, and the twiddling of the notes is one way to keep the pilgrimage going. You're constantly pulling the rug out from



under yourself, so you don't get a chance to settle into any kind of formula."

To date, Mitchell said that she has used 51 tunings. This number is so extraordinarily high in part because her tunings have lowered steadily over the years, so some tunings recur at several pitches. Generally speaking, her tunings started at a base of open E and dropped to D and then to C, and these days some even plummet to B or A in the bass. This evolution reflects the steady lowering of her voice since the '60s, a likely consequence of heavy smoking.

When Mitchell performs an older song today, she typically uses a lowered version of the original tuning. "Big Yellow Taxi," originally in open E, is now played in a low version of open C (C G C E G C, which is the same as open E dropped two whole steps). She recorded "Cherokee Louise" on *Night Ride Home* with the tuning D A E F# A D; when she performed it on the Canadian TV show *Much Music* last year, she played it in C G D E G C—a whole step lower. (This C tuning, also used for

"Night Ride Home," is her current favorite, according to Joel Bernstein.)

In some cases, the same relative tuning pops up in different registers for different songs: "Cool Water" (*Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm*) and "Slouching towards Bethlehem" (*Night Ride Home*) are in D A E G A D; a half step down, C# G# D# F# G# C#, is the tuning for "My Secret Place" (*Chalk Mark*); and a whole step below that, B F# C# E F# B, is the tuning for "Hejira."

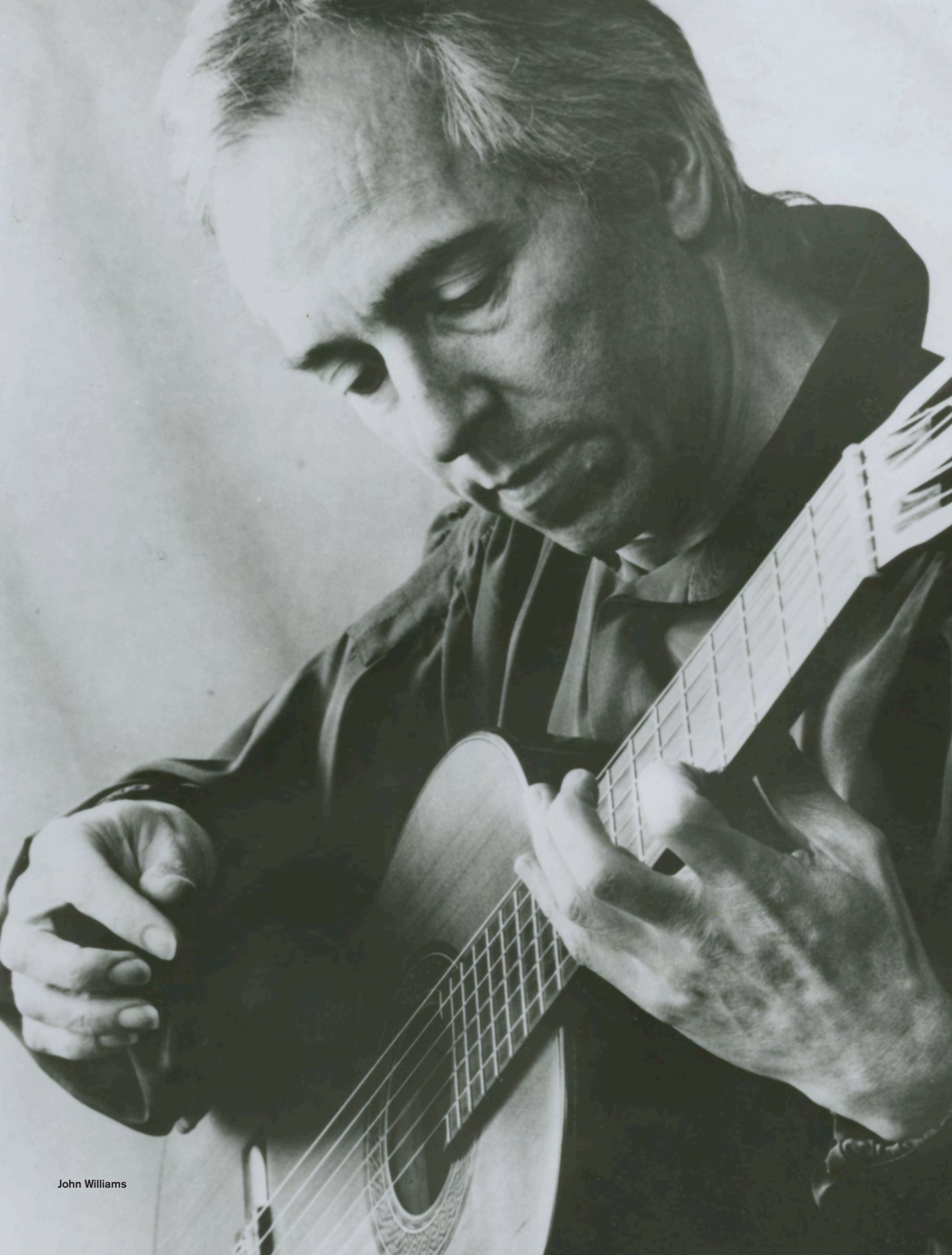
These connections allow Mitchell, in some cases, to carry fingerings from one tuning to another and find a measure of consistency, but each tuning has its own little universe of sounds and possibilities. "You never really can begin to learn the neck like a standard player, linearly and orderly," she said. "You have to think in a different way, in moving blocks. Within the context of moving blocks, there are certain things that you'll try from tuning to tuning that will apply."

An interesting tuning can be fertile ground for writing a song—as a whole pile of new-age guitar CDs amply illustrate—it's how you work the tuning with your hands and compositional sense that counts. Throughout her music, Mitchell makes the most of the freedom that open tunings allow in traveling around the neck. One of her stylistic signatures is the way she juxtaposes notes fretted high on the neck against ringing open strings. This is a great way to extend the range of the accompaniment, as you can hear on songs like "Chelsea Morning" (*Clouds*, open E), in which she plays a riff up high on the top two strings that dances over the open bass strings, followed by a fretted bass part that moves below the open treble strings.

In Mitchell's later songs, with their more radical tunings, the ringing open strings take on a different sort of drone quality—she uses them between chords as a sort of connecting thread in the harmony. "It's like a wash," she said. "In painting, if I start a canvas now, to get rid of the vertigo of the blank page, I cover the whole thing in olive green, then start working the color into it. So every color is permeated with that green. It doesn't really green the colors out but it antiques them, burnishes them. The drones kind of burnish the chord in the same way. That color remains as a wash. These other colors then drop in, but always against that wash."

Upper melodies, moving bass lines, drone strings—all these components of Mitchell's guitar style are rooted in her conception of the guitar as a multivoiced instrument. "When I'm playing the guitar," she said, "I hear it as an orchestra: the top three strings being my horn section, the bottom three being cello, viola, and bass—the bass being indicated but not rooted." **AC**





John Williams

# INTO THE NEW WORLD

John Williams travels beyond the classical guitar's European roots

BY MARK L. SMALL

In the pantheon of classical guitar greats, Australia's John Williams stands as a most imposing figure. For decades he has been the archetype for recitalists of the post-Segovia era. His singular technical abilities and thoroughgoing approach to the music he plays have set very high standards for those seeking to follow him. His copious discography contains enduring renditions of the monuments of the core repertoire and forays into musical territory few other classical guitarists have trod. History views Andrés Segovia as the guitar virtuoso spanning the 19th- and 20th-century traditions. In all likelihood, Williams will be considered the pathfinder leading the classical guitar from the 20th into the 21st century.

I spoke with Williams during his recent trip to the States for some advance promotion of his latest Sony album, *The Guitarist*. The stunning new disc underscores Williams' passion for finding great new material in out-of-the-way sources. On it, Williams combines music from many places and times, putting songs of medieval Italy alongside newer entries shaped by contemporary culture in Australia, Turkey, Greece, and England, where Williams partly grew up and currently lives. Williams' absolute mastery of the instrument, big-picture approach to music interpretation, and familiarity with the far-flung periods and places from which this music sprang make these disparate selections coalesce very naturally.

In conversation Williams revealed himself to be gregarious, unpretentious, and deep-thinking. Not surprisingly, 40 years in the field have only fanned the flames of his passion for his profession, guitars, and music as a whole.

In 1958, at 17, Williams made his debut in London's Wigmore Hall and subsequently launched an extraordinary recording career. By now, he is not sure himself exactly how many

albums he has released, but he estimates the number to be between 80 and 90. Most have been on the CBS label (now Sony Classical).

Williams' recorded output includes a staggering portion of the solo, chamber, concerto, and duo guitar repertoire from the Renaissance through the 20th century. He has also moved in circles well outside the classical realm, including a five-year stint recording and touring with the rock/classical band Sky in the late '70s and a pair of records and several appearances with English saxophonist John Dankworth and jazz vocalist Cleo Laine. Williams' fretwork has also graced numerous movie soundtracks. From Stanley Myers' score for the 1978 Vietnam war drama *The Deer Hunter*, Williams retained a musical souvenir: the melancholic "Cavatina," still a mainstay in his repertoire. Other side trips away from solo recitals have included three albums with fellow classical guitarist Julian Bream and group efforts like John Williams and Friends (exploring world folk music) and the contemporary music ensemble Attacca.

On his new record, Williams made a conscious move away from the sounds of Classical- and Romantic-era guitar repertoire and chose pieces leaning toward Eastern Mediterranean and medieval sounds. The disc features "Three Epitafios" by Greek songwriter Mikis Theodorakis; Carlo Domeniconi's Eastern-influenced suite "Koyunbaba"; "Gymnopedie No. 3" and "Gnossiennes Nos. 1 and 2," by French anti-Romantic Erik Satie; three anonymous medieval



Excerpted from the  
January 1999 issue  
of *Acoustic Guitar*



melodies; and a multimovement piece by Australian Phillip Houghton. The album's most unexpected treat is "Aeolian Suite," a work penned by Williams himself for guitar and orchestra.

During our conversation, Williams touched several times upon his strong belief that rhythm is the basis of music and that a steady rhythmic pulse frees rather than restrains a performer's expression. He took a surprisingly "unclassical" approach to his suite in the studio by opting to prerecord his guitar part to a click track and then overdub the orchestra.

Williams keeps a very open mind when choosing music for a new album or tour. "I don't go in search of new music or new masterpieces," he said. "I don't have that view of guitar music. My attitude is that interesting music is written as a result of musical activity, communication, and life in general. This applies to all music.

"For the past 20 to 30 years, the influence of jazz, blues, and popular music, and the influence of flamenco, traditional ethnic, and world music has made things different than they were before. So I don't feel it is a necessity to be looking to extend the guitar's repertoire by having so-called 'important' new pieces written for it. I think it is great when they are written, but for me, it is not an obsession.

"I don't want to be misunderstood on this point. Some great pieces have been commissioned from composers like Benjamin Britten, Peter Sculthorpe, Leo Brouwer, and others, but I don't think that is the only thing happening in guitar music. Because of the universality of its sound, the classical guitar links with plucked-string and percussion instruments from Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Far East. There are great opportunities to be a part of many different kinds of music. I find that as interesting as anything else that has happened."

From time to time, Williams would take out his guitar to make a musical point for me. His natural, effortless technique and beautiful tone prompted questions about his formative years as a guitarist. He attributes his facility to the excellent tutelage he received at an early age from his father. Few realize that he had only a handful of classes with Segovia. Many people believe that the maestro was pivotal in Williams' development. He strenuously denies that notion. "As many may know by now, I am critical of the legacy of Segovia's teaching," said Williams. "He was fantastic to me and a great inspiration to a whole generation, but he was also a very difficult human being, and he behaved, in personal terms, abominably toward me and my father. I have to say, with the benefit of hindsight, that I don't think he was a good teacher.



"He taught as many of his generation did—by example. That is all right up to a point, but he never elucidated what the important things in music were. He didn't tell us what to aim for in the structure. For example, in a Bach suite, he never spoke about how the movements should contrast to construct a nicely balanced whole. He was always talking about little bits of rubato or fingering, his interpretive mannerisms. He would just say play this faster or slower and perhaps give an example of his beautiful sound on the second string.

"I think I learned the most about guitar from my father. He was a great teacher. He taught me from when I was four or five to 12 or 13. He wanted me to make that beautiful Segovia sound and spent a lot of time on hand position and being relaxed. He also wanted no unnecessary hand movement. He taught about control of tone color and that technique is not about speed, but is for control of dynamics.

"I continue to learn about music from other musicians: violinists, pianists, and other contemporaries. That is where I learned music, not from Segovia. My father was very strict with me, perhaps too strict, but I am really happy with the results."

**'When you look at the mix of blues and rock with traditional and folk elements, you see the development of a sort of worldwide urban culture'**

I told Williams that in comparing his recent recordings to his earlier ones, I felt his playing had become more expressive as the years passed. "A number of people have said that to me," he replied. "There is a change, but it is not deliberate. I think that my playing has widened out in general, but rhythmically I have become much more emphatic. So my playing has not become more expressive in the sense that it is less rhythmic. I have always felt rhythmic pulse whether the piece is fast or slow. The idea of the rhythm being subservient to a rubato doesn't appeal to me. I feel rubato, expressive, improvisational playing, happens above the beat.

"The Segovia gesture—extra vibrato and dwelling on a note or chord at a cadence—is not musical freedom. There has been a tendency among guitar players to think that doing

these things for their own sake quite apart from the context of a piece of music as a whole is in some way expressive. I view them as simply mannerisms—maybe lovely ones—but just mannerisms. Freedom happens above the pulse.” Williams added that after he started playing guitars by Australian luthier Greg Smallman, he felt the instrument gave him more expressive resources:

“The reason for the lattice bracing, very lightweight top, and heavy construction elsewhere is to produce a less percussive sound, even when you play loud. The top is less stiff and springy than a traditional Spanish guitar’s, which has a spruce top and fan struts. With a traditional guitar, the stronger you pluck, the more you hear the fundamental percussive attack. Smallman’s tops work more like a drum skin—the entire top is working from the word go. Instead of the stiffer places over the bridge sounding first and then the fan strutting working next, the whole top is working. On a fan-strutted guitar, not much energy gets out to the edges of the top. Smallman’s idea is to get as much energy as possible out there. The Smallman gives a greater variety in tone colors. There is not simply a difference between playing *ponticello* and *dolce*, but all of the shades in between are there.”

Williams sees a *fin de siècle* lyricism coming into vogue in the waning years of a century that, for better and for worse, has seen much musical innovation. He reflected on his involvement in the late-1960s avant-garde movement and how it ultimately proved to be a blind alley. “The avant-garde existed because of the enthusiasm of performing musicians, me included, who wanted to do new things just for the sake of doing them,” he said. “It is fun to rehearse for a week with a chamber group and then perform a new piece. An enormous amount of money from the BBC, new music committees, and public grants was poured into producing avant-garde concerts. [Audiences] simply didn’t go to them. A few great pieces survived from that era, and we have forgotten the rubbish. Today there is a return to lyricism, but it is not a looking back, it’s returning to a timeless, universal thing that was always there—sort of social and communal culture.”

The guitarist shared his opinions on the continuing evolution of Western music and the guitar’s place in it. “The idea that the best music is European music is having the ground cut away beneath it,” he said. “The influence of blues, jazz, American popular songs, and musicals on the vocabulary of classical music in this century has been enormous. When you look at the mix of blues and rock with

traditional and folk elements, you see the development of a sort of worldwide urban culture. Add to that the influence of world music, and you’ve got an enormous sea of interest in music in general today.

“About 150 years ago, the guitar was not part of what was going on in classical music. You had a Giuliani concerto and some solos, but guitar was only part of the amateur music scene. Today, in the worldwide musical culture, across the board, guitar is right up there in the middle of it; I’m talking about the *classical* guitar. It is used in films, in traditional African

music, folk and Celtic music, and much more. Madagascar has a whole history of classical guitar playing in their traditional music.

“Earlier in this century, you could have said that most music was either popular or classical European music. But classical composers today have been influenced by the harmonies of popular and jazz music, just as jazz itself was influenced by the harmonies in the music of Ravel and Debussy. The 20th century has seen a total change colored by this mix. In some ways, it is hard to know where we are . . . but I think that is good.”

AG

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John Renbourn onstage in 2007

# FINGERSTYLE AUTHORITY

**John Renbourn on his distinctive steel-string technique and his approach to arranging for many genres**

BY TEJA GERKEN

In the history of the fingerstyle genre, John Renbourn is perhaps the most influential guitarist still actively performing. Whether as a solo artist, playing duets (most famously with Bert Jansch in the 1960s and later with Stefan Grossman), leading his own group, or as a founding member of the seminal British folk-jazz ensemble Pentangle, Renbourn's playing has left a profound imprint on the modern landscape of acoustic music.

Born in London, in 1944, Renbourn was introduced to music by his mother, who played classical piano. Although he studied classical guitar in school, Renbourn's hands-on involvement with music began in earnest during England's skiffle craze of the late 1950s, eventually leading to a stint playing electric guitar in a band called Hog Snort Rupert's Famous Porkestra. Attending London's Kingston College of Art in the early '60s, Renbourn became involved with a group of students (including Eric Clapton and cohorts, who eventually formed the Yardbirds) more interested in blues and rock 'n' roll than painting.

While some of his contemporaries were reinventing electric blues, Renbourn became interested in fusing American fingerpicking blues influences with the sounds found in the flourishing British folk revival. Heavily influenced by Davey Graham and Shirley Collins' 1964 release *Folk Roots, New Routes*, Renbourn began performing with American singer Dorris Henderson, with whom he made his recording debut, 1965's *There You Go!* Later the same year, his self-titled solo LP was released on Transatlantic Records, making it one of the earliest recordings featuring solo steel-string guitar instrumentals. Among them was "Judy," a tune that borrowed heavily from Graham's composition "Anji" in its contrapuntal movements, and which is still in Renbourn's repertoire today.

Countless hours of playing with his flat-mate Bert Jansch led to the legendary collaborations between the two guitarists. Released in 1966, *Bert and John* remains required listening for anyone interested in tackling steel-string duets. Already at the center of London's thriving folk-music scene, Renbourn and Jansch decided to

expand their musical lineup. Vocalist Jacqui McShee had made an appearance on Renbourn's solo debut, and bluesman Alexis Korner, with whom Renbourn and Jansch often jammed, introduced them to Danny Thompson (bass) and Terry Cox (drums). The five joined together as the Pentangle and devised a melting pot of folk, jazz, blues, and world music (Renbourn even played sitar on some tracks). The band enjoyed huge success between 1968 and 1973, when it broke up; decades later, it's impossible to discuss folk-jazz fusion without mentioning the quintet.

Now living in rural Scotland, Renbourn continues to tour the globe, mostly solo, but recently also in a duo with McShee. Although his most recent studio recording, *Traveller's Prayer*, was released in 1998, and his live shows—represented by the recording *John Renbourn Live in Italy*, which came out in 2006—focus on an established repertoire, he continues to work on new material, in particular arrangements of early music composers, including John Dowling. I met Renbourn last July in Occidental, California, where our interview was followed by a dinner of salmon and abalone—caught the previous day by Renbourn's U.S. booking agent, Matthew Greenhill of Folklore Productions—under a star-filled summer sky.

**You've been around the fingerstyle guitar community as long as anyone. How do you think the scene has changed in the last 30 or 40 years?**

Some of the first fingerstyle players I heard were British people who were copying the American fingerpickers. The first wave of people to actually do that style of playing were revivalist players, among them Ramblin' Jack Elliott. Jack made some records that included Gary Davis' "Cocaine" and maybe "Railroad Bill." So he'd listened to Etta Baker, Elizabeth Cotten, and Reverend Gary Davis, whom nobody had ever heard of in England. And Peggy Seeger played "Freight Train," and it was a hit—not by her, unfortunately, but by a skiffle group. But it made people aware of that old style of picking. In Britain, hardly anyone could play that way, and it was a bit of a revelation. A few guys got hold of the

older, American-based style, but it was a real minority thing. It has expanded to an unbelievable degree! I was about 14 when I first heard that kind of stuff. Now I'm 62, and everybody I meet has taken it in an amazing direction. It's just lovely that it has gone on and developed.

The whole story was that the British guys were copying the Americans as best as they could, and the American guys weren't always there, so when they weren't around, people started to make things up themselves. There were players coming up who were actually very creative and very original. The outstanding guy was Davey Graham, without a doubt.

**What do you think of the notion that there are distinct British and American schools of fingerstyle guitar playing?**

I think there could have been many more schools. It just so happened that the Americans had the record industry, so that established one kind of style. For me, Merle Travis is one of the greatest players I ever heard; I love that stuff. The British record companies began to record people like me in the early days simply because it was very cheap! Amazingly enough, those records started influencing people all over Europe, so a lot of people came out very quickly, playing steel-string guitar in the places where those records were released. Maybe it was easier for people to get our records than to get the American records, so things began moving further east, if you will.

What I think happened is that everyone thinks that the American style of playing is solely boom-chick based, and it's always associated with Chet Atkins, and then the folk people got interested, and started hearing some of the old-time players, who were actually very varied and beautiful. Etta Baker is a lovely player, and of



Excerpted from  
the March 2007  
issue of *Acoustic  
Guitar*



course Gary Davis was amazing. They're not really quite as formulated as Chet Atkins.

Then Davey Graham made a record with Shirley Collins, and that kind of opened the floodgates, and then Bert [Jansch] began to play more traditional tunes—he was already writing contemporary songs—and playing like Brownie McGhee. Martin Carthy, of course, developed his very unique and strong approach, mainly based on songs. So the guitar styles were actually influenced by traditional songs, and when you have that, and the traditional song is something that doesn't fit into a boom-chick [structure], and it's got a totally different thing with different time signatures, a modal melody, and inner rhythms, then boom-chick doesn't work, so you've got to find another way around it, and it becomes something different. You take away the initial influence, which is the song, and you're left with something on the guitar that sounds like a guitar style, a school.

**There is a common thread in your playing, where your style is identifiable through different kinds of music. Do you use a similar approach in working on, say, folk, blues, jazz, or classical compositions?**

I'm not sure. If I work on something, I follow through the idea, as far as I can, and if it comes out with a stamp that people identify with me, that's more accidental. I don't think it's anything that I plan. These days, I never work [directly] on the guitar anyway, so maybe it comes later.

**On tunes like "Watch the Stars," you use a fairly simple fingerpicking pattern in your accompaniment role, and I was wondering whether you have a set of patterns that you use, or whether you adapt each pattern and start from scratch to make it work.**

There aren't any actual patterns anymore in my playing. There never really were; I never liked the idea of there being patterns. Most [fingerstyle playing] is treble and bass, and to have a set pattern in the thumb often doesn't give you a very logical bass line. It gives you a pattern, but if you cook the bass line on its own, it wouldn't sound very coherent. It can sound very good for certain things that are actually from that music, but once you play something that doesn't fit that, you have to look for something else.

**A lot of singer-songwriter-based players tend to do exactly that, go with a set of patterns. It's something that separates a player like yourself: thinking about the music and adapting the right-hand technique.** [Plays Example 1, excerpt from "Watch the Stars."] That's a little different from an actual pattern picking, isn't it?

**I was curious about your arrangement of "Plains of Waterloo." It sounds like you're doubling the vocal melody on the middle strings, and you have a bit of a drone going on the top strings. Is that a technique you use frequently?**

That's in one of the DADGAD variations. It's D A D E A D [in which string 3 is tuned down a minor third from standard or DADGAD —*ed.*]. When Davey introduced DADGAD by playing "She Moves Through the Fair" in the early '60s, it was an *enormous* breakthrough. He really hit it; that was exactly what the guitar needed, to integrate it with the singing style. It took a thing like "She Moves Through the Fair," which was a hallowed unaccompanied song, and not only did he play it great, but he took it apart and improvised on it. It was really revolutionary and great. It wasn't the virtuosic quality as much as the ideas. Many people started to use DADGAD or slight variations of DADGAD, and the first attempts were basically to play the tune on the middle two strings and use the open strings as drones on the top and the bottom [Example 2].

**So you're pretty much doubling the vocal part on the guitar?**

Yeah, it's not an arrangement at all; I just play the tune! When Jacqui [McShee] does some ornaments, I try to follow those as well. A lot of those things were very simple to start with. "A Maid That's Deep in Love" [Example 3, played in DADGAD] is similar. It's not exactly the same, but similar. All the very early DADGAD things were pretty much like that, doubling the song on the inner strings.

**Let's talk about your use of bends in "South Wind." It's not something very many Irish players would do. Is that the blues influence in your playing?**

Have you heard Willie Clancy, the piper? A lot of those pipers, they've got one note that they can push up, depending on the drones, so they do get those bends in Irish music. The guitar is built for that, and the blues players were using it, but not the traditional players. I think when you play not in a blues scale but in one of the modes, you can get some nice colors.

**You bend the string down, toward the treble string, not up like a blues player would, is that right?**

Yes. Have you ever played the sitar? What you have to do is to get a hold of the whole string and pull it. With those sort of bends, people say, "My God, how can you bend a string at the second fret?" I guess what I'm doing is, I'm actually holding three fingers down.

**Your early work with Bert Jansch set the standard for steel-string guitar duets, and I've also seen you perform with Stefan Grossman and Duck Baker. I was curious about your approach to arranging for two guitars. Do you tend to think of it as adding a second part to an existing solo guitar arrangement, or do you think of a way of splitting the parts up?**

The thing that predated me and Bert was Davey Graham and Alexis [Korner], doing "3/4 A.D.," so that was the thing that we liked to listen to.

I'm interested in arranging; it's what I do more than anything else. With guitar arranging, there isn't any one way of doing it. With Stefan [Grossman], some of the pieces were based on ideas that he had, almost like solo pieces, and he said, "Could we make a duet out of this?" I'd listen to what he was doing, and figure it out: If he's doing something in that register, and I play a part that's an extension harmonically of what he was doing on the top, then we'll have a part that works.

**In which case you're adding to something that already works as a solo arrangement?**

If that's what you're doing, yes. Otherwise, you might have something that's quite different, and the two parts aren't independent on their own.

**Do you prefer one way or the other?**

It all depends on the music. I don't think the approach comes before the music. The music actually dictates what you want to do. I made an arrangement of a John Dowling piece, "[My] Lord Willoughby's Welcome Home." It was a lute piece, and I found out that I couldn't play it on the guitar, so the only way of doing it was to have it as two guitars, and then the idea goes from there. [See Renbourn's arrangement of another Renaissance piece, William Byrd's "The Earl of Salisbury," in the January/February 2020 issue. —*ed.*]

**How did you split it up?**

By integrating the two parts, so they became a whole, like a keyboard piece. With guitar players, you can easily sit down and one guy plays chords, and the other plays the melody, but how interesting is that?

**Do you ever use recording yourself in the writing process?**

Usually not. The writing is just done on a piece of paper. It's really old-style compositions, perceived to be playable as is. There have been occasions where I've wanted parts to do different things that were impossible. And then you have to deliberate, "Should I really do this?" And the answer is, yeah, of course, if you can do it; the music is what counts.

---

*John Renbourn died on March 26, 2015, at 70. AG*

### Example 1

Capo II

♩ = 144

Chords: A/E, E7, A/E, E, A/E, E7, A/E

\*Music sounds in the key of B major.

### Example 2

Tuning: D A D E A D

♩ = 192

Chords: D, A7, D

### Example 3

Tuning: D A D G A D

Chords: D, Cadd9, G5, D

let ring throughout





Bob Dylan at the March on Washington  
for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963

# HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

**Bob Dylan just may be the best acoustic guitarist you've never bothered to notice**

BY ADAM LEVY

**F**irst and foremost, Bob Dylan is a wordsmith. His lyrics are the reason people still buy his records—old and new—and continue to flock to his concerts. His way with language is why every generation of songwriters since the early 1960s has studied his work. Dylan's words are what kept his 2004 memoir *Chronicles* on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 19 weeks. Yet, for all the accolades Dylan has earned as a writer, there is an aspect of his artistry that often gets overlooked: his great acoustic guitar playing. It's been there all along, for anyone who cared to notice.

On the 50th anniversary of *John Wesley Harding*, an album that signaled the beginning of a seven-year period in which Dylan would record *The Basement Tapes* and release a half-dozen largely acoustic albums, *AG* decided to showcase his acoustic side. Of course, Dylan has expressed his acoustic side throughout his nearly seven-decade-long career. In this lesson feature, I'll take a close look at some of Dylan's deceptive chord moves, his fluency with standard and non-standard tunings, and his knack for constant reinvention. The music examples are mostly drawn from his early work. He's made a lot of great music in the ensuing years, of course, but his relatively spare early recordings are where the fundamentals of Dylan's style are most easily heard and appreciated.

## DO LOOK BACK

In the early 1960s, at the beginning of his career, Dylan was an unabashed folkie. He wrote and sang of landmark news events such as the assassination of civil-rights activist Medgar Evers ("Only a Pawn in Their Game"), warmongering ("Masters of War"), and social

justice ("A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall"). While honing his own material, the young artist also took it upon himself to become a walking compendium of traditional American styles, absorbing song after song. On his eponymous 1962 Columbia Records debut, featuring just his voice, harmonica, and solo acoustic guitar, Dylan showcases his ease with such forms—on the gospel song "In My Time of Dying," for example, and Blind Lemon Jefferson's blues "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean."

Columbia released Dylan's second record, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, just a year later. It was a huge leap forward, artistically, featuring a dozen original songs—including the instant classics "Blowin' in the Wind" and "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right"—as well as the traditional "Corrina, Corrina" (featuring the ornamental second guitar of studio ace Bruce Langhorne). *Freewheelin'* closely followed the sonic template of its predecessor—vocal, harmonica, and mostly solo acoustic guitar (often strummed close to the bridge to give a percussive effect)—yet Dylan's guitar work is more confident and more varied than before. His continued development is evident on *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, in 1964, with Dylan employing a wider variety of strumming patterns and some lovely fingerpicking on "One Too Many Mornings" (more on this song later). *Another Side of*



From the December 2016 issue of *Acoustic Guitar*



## BOD DYLAN

*Bob Dylan*, also released in '64, finds Dylan once again in solo troubadour mode. Featuring "My Back Pages" and "It Ain't Me Babe," the entire album, incredibly, was recorded in just one long, late-night session.

In 1965, Dylan did something that many fans and critics never saw coming—he went electric, donning a Stratocaster at the Newport Folk Festival. Backed by electric guitarist Michael Bloomfield and other members of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Dylan's amped-up set caused an uproar. That same year, he released not one but *two* albums pulsing with rock 'n' roll energy—*Bringing It All Back Home*, in March, then *Highway 61 Revisited* five months later. The double-LP *Blonde on Blonde* was released in May of '66 and features several of the songs that would later become Dylan's calling cards, including "Visions of Johanna" and "Just Like a Woman." He returned to Nashville and released *John Wesley Harding* at the end of 1967. Though the album features a small backing band—bass, drums, and occasional pedal-steel guitar—the tone is spartan compared with the three energized releases that preceded it.

## HIGHER & HIGHER

Dylan's acoustic guitar chimes clearly throughout each song on *John Wesley Harding*. He sometimes achieves this by using a capo to move his voicings farther up the fretboard than you might expect—presumably so his chords won't get lost in the mix. The higher-register guitar also frees up more latitude for his voice.

"I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine" is a good example of his use of a capo on *John Wesley Harding*. The song is in the key of F major. Dylan could've played it in E with his capo at the first fret, or in D with the capo at the third fret—but he plays the song in C with the capo at the fifth fret. (The recording also features a second acoustic-guitar track, much quieter in the mix, played in a lower position.)

**Example 1** is in the style of "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine."

Similarly, the album's title track is in the key of F and played in C with a capo at the fifth fret. The track "As I Went Out One Morning" is in the key of F# minor, played in D minor, with a capo at the fourth fret. An interesting aspect of the specific voicings in Ex. 1 is that two of them—F/C and D7/A—have the fifth in the bass instead of the root. (The note C is the fifth degree of the chord F; A is the fifth of D7.) Dylan has used this inverted harmony repeatedly throughout his repertoire.

## NEVER THE SAME WAY

Unlike many singer-songwriters, Dylan has never



## Part of Dylan's genius as a player and songwriter is that he can take simple musical ideas and rework them in seemingly endless combinations.

been precious about performing his songs live the same way he recorded them. "Desolation Row" is a classic example. On the original studio recording—from *Highway 61 Revisited*—he plays this epic three-chord song in drop-C tuning (C A D G B E), with a capo at the fourth fret, sounding in E.

**Example 2a** is similar to the first four bars of each verse section of "Desolation Row." This particular tuning and capo setup gives Dylan a sonorous low-C bass note, even though he's four frets above open position. It also makes it easy to grab the harmonically ambiguous Cadd4 by adding his fourth finger, which he does consistently on this version of "Desolation Row." (It's worth noting that the *Highway 61 Revisited* recording of the song features Nashville session guitarist Charlie

McCoy, who provides tasty acoustic-guitar fills from start to finish.)

Dylan played at Manchester Free Trade Hall in the UK during his 1966 world tour. A bootleg recording of the show has circulated ever since, with the venue misidentified as the "Royal Albert Hall." Dylan's acoustic and electric sets from that night were officially released in 1998 as *The Bootleg Series Vol. 4: Bob Dylan Live 1966, The "Royal Albert Hall" Concert*. His version of "Desolation Row" from that performance is markedly different from the one on *Highway 61 Revisited*. He plays the song at a slightly brighter tempo, in the key of D, in drop-D tuning. (Interestingly, he uses that drop-C tuning—with capo at the fifth fret—for a down-tempo rendition of "Just Like a Woman," but not for "Desolation Row.") **Example 2b** is inspired by Dylan's "Desolation Row" verses as played at that show in '66.

When Dylan performed "Desolation Row" during his 1994 appearance on *MTV Unplugged* (later released as a live album), he took a different approach to the song altogether. Here, he's in the key of D, in *standard* tuning. Backed by a five-piece band—including the tasteful Bucky Baxter on Dobro—Dylan pares down his



part to nothing more than palm-muted power chords, not unlike **Example 2c**.

### PET SOUNDS

It's not unusual to find Dylan using and reusing a limited array of his favorite harmonic elements within each album. These may include particular tunings, chord progressions, chord voicings, and such. That's part of his genius as a player and songwriter—that he can take simple musical ideas and rework them in seemingly endless combinations.

There are ten guitar songs on *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (an 11th track, “Black Crow Blues,” is played on piano.) Half of these ten are in the key of G, played in open position, using rudimentary chords. The album's rollicking opening song—“All I Really Want to Do”—is in G with a capo at the second fret, again using common chords. Three of the remaining songs—“My Back Pages,” “I Don't Believe You,” and the ironically titled “Ballad in Plain D”—are played in C, using the capo for transposition to nearby keys. “To Ramona” is also played in C, without capo. That's a lot of juice squeezed from just two humble pieces of fruit: the key of G and the key of C.

The main thing that sets each of these songs apart from all other three-chord songs is their knockout lyrical punch. However, Dylan's guitar work is rarely as straightforward as it seems upon first listen. If you take the time to

### Example 1 (à la “I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine”)

#### Capo V

♩ = 106

Chord progression: C, F/c, C, D7/A, F/c

Tablature for Example 1:

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Chord	C	F/c	C	D7/A	F/c			
Tab	0 1 0 2 3	1 1 2 0 3	0 1 0 2 3	2 1 2 0 0	1 1 2 0 3			

\*Music sounds a perfect fourth higher than written.

Chord progression: C, F/c, C, C/B, Am, Am7/G, F/c, C

Tablature for Example 1 (continued):

Measure	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Chord	C	F/c	C	C/B	Am	Am7/G	F/c	C
Tab	0 1 0 2 3	1 1 2 0 3	0 1 0 2 3	0 0 1 1 2	0 1 1 2 0	0 1 2 2 0	1 1 2 0 3	0 1 0 2 3



really check out what he's playing behind his broadsides and ballads, you may be shocked by the nuances his hands are capable of.

Take, for example, the aforementioned songs in the key of C from *Another Side*. On all of these, the home-base C chord is nearly always played as C/G (Example 3). Placing the chord's fifth (G) in the bass, instead of the expected root (C), gives the chord an expansive quality.

Dylan uses a similar sonority on "Blowin' in the Wind," from *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. Played in G, with the capo at seventh fret, the song sounds in the key of D (Example 4, in the style of "Blowin'"). The chord in bars 11–12 includes the open first string (E), giving the B minor triad a little extra bite. Subtle? Yes. But without this stepwise bass motion, the song would sound like a million other I–IV–V–I songs.

To hear that fifth-in-the-bass voicing in another context, check out Example 5, loosely based on Dylan's "I Am a Lonesome Hobo," from *John Wesley Harding*. In this protracted blues (a 19-bar cycle in lieu of the standard 12), Dylan propels the music forward by never letting the I chord (G) settle, toggling between G and C/G instead. The effect is kind of Stones-y—as if Mick Jagger and Keith Richards had decided to be folkies for a day.

On "It Ain't Me Babe"—from *Another Side*—Dylan uses that bottom-heavy chord



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### Example 2a (à la "Desolation Row")

Tuning: C A D G B E, Capo IV ♩ = 106

Example 2a shows a musical score for guitar in C major with a capo at the fourth fret. The score consists of two systems. The first system has five measures with chords: C, Cadd4, C, F/c, and C. The second system has three measures with chords: D, G/D, and D. The guitar tablature is provided below the staff, showing fingerings for each measure. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 106.

\* Music sounds a major third higher than written.

### Example 2b

Tuning: D A D G B E ♩ = 114

Example 2b shows a musical score for guitar in D major with standard tuning. The score consists of two systems. The first system has three measures with chords: D, G/D, and D. The second system has three measures with chords: D, G/D, and D. The guitar tablature is provided below the staff, showing fingerings for each measure. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 114.

### Ex. 2c Standard Tuning ♩ = 126

Ex. 2c shows a musical score for guitar in D major with standard tuning. The score consists of two systems. The first system has four measures with chords: G/D, D, Dsus4, and D5. The second system has four measures with chords: G5, D5, D5, and D5. The guitar tablature is provided below the staff, showing fingerings for each measure. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 126. The text "P.M. throughout" is written below the tablature.



**If you take the time to really check out what Dylan's playing behind his broadsides and ballads, you may be shocked by the nuances his hands are capable of.**

powerful solo-acoustic record, *World Gone Wrong*. On the title track, the songwriter works his understated magic again. As he did in "I Am a Lonesome Hobo," Dylan builds "World Gone Wrong" on an expanded blues form. In this sort of atmosphere, only three simple chords are needed to get the job done, but that wouldn't be very Dylan. Look at **Example 7**, inspired by "World Gone Wrong." Notice the curious Cadd4 chord on the fourth beat of bars 2, 4, and 6? It's similar to the chord you saw in Ex. 2a (bar 1, beat 3). This particular voicing also could be called C/F, as all three notes of the C triad (C, E, and G) are present above the bottommost F note. Regardless of the nomenclature, this chord upends the harmony every time it comes around.

E7/D, the second "mystery chord" in "World Gone Wrong," comes into play in bar 4. With its ear-tugging tritone interval (G $\sharp$ -D), the chord sounds unresolved and misplaced. As in Dylan's original, the E7/D here seems to be justified when you get to the F chord in bar 5.

One more harmonic oddity appears in bars 15 and 16. It's unusual to find *any* major seven chord in a blues song; in this case, it's an unexpected chord in an unexpected voicing, with the open second string (B) rubbing against the fretted C a half step away on the third string.

form again. Check out **Example 6**, inspired by "It Ain't Me Babe." Bars 7–10 could be played as a static G chord; in this example, however, as in Dylan's original, there's a syncopated move to C/G (bar 7, beat 4). That C/G blurs the line between the I (G) and IV (C) chords. C/G reappears four bars before the end of this example. There are a few other unorthodox chord voicings worth looking at here. Right off the bat, in bars 1

and 2, the D chord is rendered by fretting a common C chord two frets higher than usual, which lets the open third string (G) rub against the fretted F $\sharp$  on the fourth string. The Bm chord in bar 11 includes the open first string (E), giving the chord a little extra bite. As in the previous example, C/G reappears here four bars before the end.

In 1993, nearly 30 years after the release of *Another Side*, Dylan released an equally

### Example 3

### Example 4 (à la "Blowin' in the Wind") Capo VII

**Example 3:** C/G 342010

**Example 4:**  $\text{♩} = 90$ , Capo VII. Chords: G, C, C/B, D/A, D/F $\sharp$ , G.

Tablature for Example 4 (Capo VII):

String	Bar 1 (G)	Bar 2 (G)	Bar 3 (C)	Bar 4 (C/B)	Bar 5 (D/A)	Bar 6 (D/F#)	Bar 7 (G)
1	0	3	0	0	2	3	3
2	1	0	1	1	3	0	0
3	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
4	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
5	3	3	3	2	0	3	3
6	3	3	3	2	0	3	3

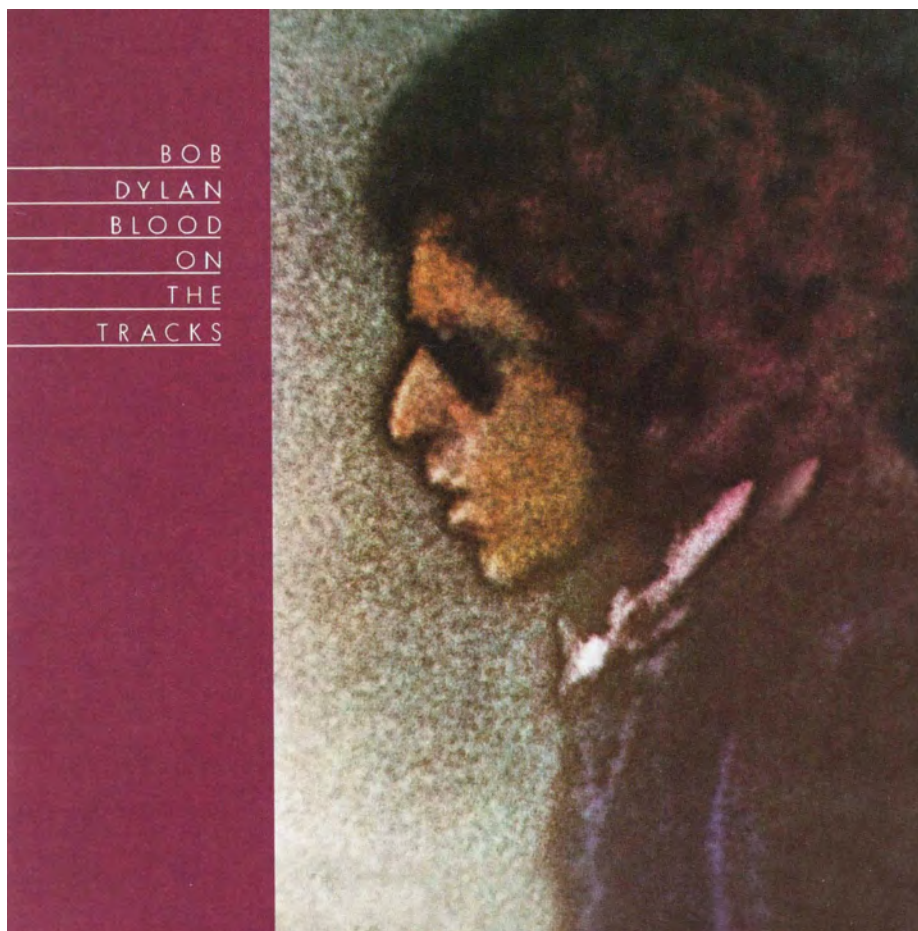
\*Music sounds a perfect fifth higher than written.



## ARE WE TUNING, BOB?

As interested as Dylan is in the novel effects of unusual chord voicings, it's no surprise he uses alternate tunings from time to time. His early work features several songs in drop D (D A D G B E), including "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" and "Mr. Tambourine Man." He also favored double-drop D (D A D G B D), as you can hear in "Ballad of Hollis Brown," and drop C (C A D G B E), in "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands," "Desolation Row," and other songs. In addition to those, Dylan has used a handful of open-chord tunings, among them open G (D G D G B D), used on "I Was Young When I Left Home," and open D (D A D F# A D) or open E (E B E G# B E), which he used extensively on *Blood on the Tracks*. The final few examples in this lesson illustrate some of these tunings.

**Example 8** is styled after Dylan's take on the folk-blues tune "Corrina, Corrina," from *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. It is played in open D (D A D F# A D) with a capo at the third fret, sounding in the key of F. The chord voicings in bar 2 reprise two Dylan-centric moves that you've seen throughout this lesson—G/D is a triad with its fifth in the bass; Aadd4 is akin to the unsettled (add4) chords used earlier, in Ex. 2a and Ex. 7. Note that the guitar part is more active in bars 3 and 4—in between the vocal phrase—and less active while Dylan is singing. This helps the music



## Example 5 (à la "I Am a Lonesome Hobo")

♩ = 118

G C/G G C/G G C/G G C/G G *play three times*

6 G D C G C D G C/G G

The musical notation for Example 5 consists of two systems. The first system has five measures. The guitar staff (treble clef, key of F) shows chords G, C/G, G, C/G, G, C/G, G, C/G, G. The bass staff (bass clef) shows fingerings: 3, 0, 0, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3. The second system has five measures. The guitar staff shows chords G, D, C, G, C, D, G, C/G, G. The bass staff shows fingerings: 3, 0, 2, 0, 0, 3, 0, 3, 3.



feel conversational, with the voice and guitar exchanging phrases back and forth as the song rolls along.

On *Blood on the Tracks*, Dylan pushed this same tuning style (though in open E) far beyond the folk-blues idiom, playing each of the album's ten songs in the same tuning (sometimes transposed, via capo). "Simple Twist of Fate" is an example of how he developed a chordal vocabulary rich enough to match his narrative prowess. In **Example 9**, you can trace some of his "Simple Twist of Fate" maneuvers. (This example is written in open D with a capo at the second fret, so that you don't have to tighten your strings up to open E.) What's so different from the previous example is that this time the I chord is not made by simply sounding the open strings; instead, it is played a few frets above open position, in two variations. "In bar 1, the D chord's fifth (A) is doubled on the

### Example 6 (à la "It Ain't Me Babe")

♩ = 106

Chord progression: D<sup>add4</sup> C D<sup>add4</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G C/G G B<sup>m(add4)/F#</sup> Am/E Am (play four times) C/G D D/F#

Example 6 shows a guitar solo in the key of D major, featuring a mix of open strings and fretted notes. The solo is written in standard notation (treble and bass clefs) and includes a guitar-specific notation system (numbers 0-5 on strings) for the fretted notes. The tempo is marked as 106 beats per minute (♩ = 106). The solo is divided into three systems of six measures each, with a repeat sign at the end of the second system. The first system covers measures 1-6, the second system covers measures 7-12, and the third system covers measures 13-18. The solo is written in the key of D major, with a capo at the second fret. The first system starts with a D<sup>add4</sup> chord, followed by a C chord, then a D<sup>add4</sup> chord, and ends with a D<sup>7</sup> chord. The second system starts with a G chord, followed by a C/G chord, then a G chord, and ends with a B<sup>m(add4)/F#</sup> chord. The third system starts with an Am/E chord, followed by an Am chord (played four times), then a C/G chord, and ends with a D and D/F# chord.



fretted third string and on the open second string. Note the slightly different harmony in bar 11, where the D chord's third (F#) is doubled instead of the fifth. This two-finger version of D makes it a little easier to get to the next two-finger chord shape, the colorful Dmaj9. Check out the two deceptively simple moves in bars 12 and 14. Lifting your finger off the second string in bar 12 changes G/B to Gadd9/B, while the same lift converts A9sus4 to A7sus4 two bars later.

Finally, **Example 10** is reminiscent of “One Too Many Mornings,” from *The Times They Are*

## As Dylan has shown time and again, it's not the broad strokes that make a song special. It's the details.

*A-Changin'.* The open-A tuning (E A C# E A C#) is novel, one that Dylan rarely uses. You may be unfamiliar with it—most players are—but it's pretty intuitive once you get a few simple shapes under your fingers. Once again, the use of A/E (triad with fifth in the bass) has Dylan's fingerprints on it. The harmony in the last few

bars (Bm11–A/C#–Bm11) is also elusive. There's a slight similarity between the melody and structure of this song and that of the title track. Thanks to the alternate tuning in “One Too Many Mornings” (“The Times They Are A-Changin'” is in standard) and a burbling fingerpicking pattern (“The Times” is strummed), the two songs have an entirely different feel.

As Dylan has shown time and again, it's not the broad strokes that make a song special. It's the details. Some details aren't meant to be noticed, but they can shine like diamonds once you know where to look. **AC**

### Example 7 (à la “World Gone Wrong”)

#### Capo II

♩ = 76

Chords: C, Cadd4 (play three times), C, E7/D, F (play four times)

\*Music sounds a major second higher than written.

Chords: G, Cmaj7/G, C, N.C., F, G7/F C

### Example 8 (à la “Corrina Corrina”)

#### Tuning: D A D F# A D, Capo III

♩ = 96

Chords: D, G/D, Aadd4/D, G/D, D, G/B, D/A, G, D/F#, Em7, D, D/A, G/B

\*Music sounds a minor third higher than written.



### Example 9 (à la “Simple Twist of Fate”)

Tuning: D A D F# A D, Capo II

♩ = 74 (♩ =  $\frac{1}{3}$ )

Chords: D, Dmaj7, D7

\*Music sounds a major second higher than written.

Chords: G/B, Gm, D, Dmaj9

Chords: G/B, Gadd9/B, D, A9sus4, A7sus4, D

### Example 10 (à la “One Too Many Mornings”)

Tuning: E A C# E A C#, Capo III

♩ = 104

Chords: A, Amaj7/G#, D/F#, A/E

\*Music sounds a minor third higher than written.

Chords: E7, A/E, Bm11, A/C#, Bm11



# Fingerstyle Blues

Embellish one simple lick to create a cool, bluesy accompaniment pattern

BY HAPPY TRAUM

One of my favorite licks can be used to accompany bluesy songs in the key of E. It's fairly easy but, if played well, can create a very evocative sound that will add movement and interest to your accompaniment. You can use it behind a 12-bar blues, or play any section of it for a measure or two.

For this lick, you only need to know three two-note shapes, using E, A, and E7 chords to imply an E7 (Example 1). Pick the notes on the fifth string with your thumb and the third-string notes with your index finger in a pinching motion. This gives you two harmony notes that move up and down together in the interval of tenths.

Once you are comfortable playing those note combinations, add the open first string between each pinch (Example 2). You can use



DION OGUST

your middle finger on the first string, but I find it more comfortable to pick this note with my ring finger. To add an extra bit of color, hammer on from the G to G# (third string) with your first finger at the beginning of the measure. The underlying feel, as in many blues songs, is a triplet rhythm, so the strong beats get two counts, and the "ands" of the beat get one. This feel will become more obvious as you change the time signature to 12/8 to stress the triplet feel. Just remember that the strong beats occur every three eighth notes (or one dotted quarter) in 12/8.

Let's make this lick a little more interesting by coming back to the third string after playing the open first string (Example 3).

Now you're playing each of the beats of the triplet. You can also substitute the open sixth string for the third beat of each three-note phrase (Example 4).

One of the nice things about this pattern is that it can easily be moved up the neck, so you can continue playing it when the song goes to the A7 (IV) chord. Since the open E (first string) is part of the A chord, the picking-hand pattern still works (Example 5). If you want to play this against the B7 (V) chord, try playing the open B string instead of the E on the second beat (Example 6). Now put all the pieces together to make a 12-bar blues progression (Example 7). I hope you enjoy this simple lick and find lots of places to use it.

AG



From the April  
2006 issue of  
*Acoustic Guitar*

♩ = 64 (♩ = ♩♩)

## Example 1

E7



## Example 2

E7



## Example 3

E7





### Example 4

E7

### Example 5

A7

### Example 6

B7

### Example 7

E7

play four times

A7





# Arranging in Alternate Tunings

Create new chord voicings that would be impossible to play in standard tuning

BY PEPPINO D'AGOSTINO

Throughout my workshops and teaching, I've noticed that alternate tunings can intimidate people. Some are concerned because they don't immediately recognize chord shapes in alternate tunings, while others feel that alternate tunings mean they have to play obscure compositions or write original tunes. But there isn't anything particularly difficult about open tunings. Let your ears guide you and don't

worry too much about theory, and you'll find that alternate tunings will allow you to create chord voicings that are impossible in standard tuning and let you sustain notes you can't in standard tuning. You can also use alternate tunings to play any song you want—not just originals or obscure fingerstyle tunes.

Let's take a look at an odd tuning—E B B F# B E—that I came up with by modifying a tuning John Renbourn used on “Reynardine.” To get into E B B F# B E tuning, raise your fifth string a whole step, to B (you'll probably want to use light-gauge strings for this tuning); lower your fourth string a step and a half, to B; and drop your third string a half step, to F#.

**Example 1** depicts a few chord shapes in this tuning. Notice how easy it is to make the

Emaj7, which would be much tougher to pull off in standard tuning. Once you have these chord shapes under your fingers, try the etude in **Example 2**, which shows how the tuning allows you to play drone notes on the fourth and fifth strings that would be nearly impossible in standard tuning.

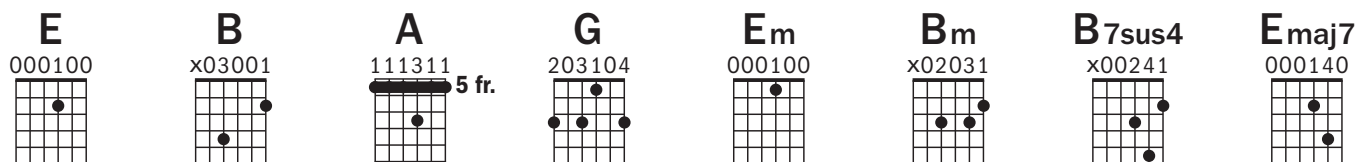
I find that the popular traditional tune “The House of the Rising Sun” sounds great in E B B F# B E. (See my arrangement on AG's website.) I encourage you to explore uncommon tunings like this. Other alternate tunings—like DADGAD or open G—have become so common that they are almost like other standard tunings. But there are many more possibilities, and if you give them a chance you'll discover that they're far less intimidating than you think. **AG**



From the April 2006 issue of *Acoustic Guitar*

Tuning: E B B F# B E

**Example 1**



**Example 2**

**B**

**C#m**

p i m p i m p i a p i a p i a p p i a p i a p i

**E**

a p i a p i a p etc.

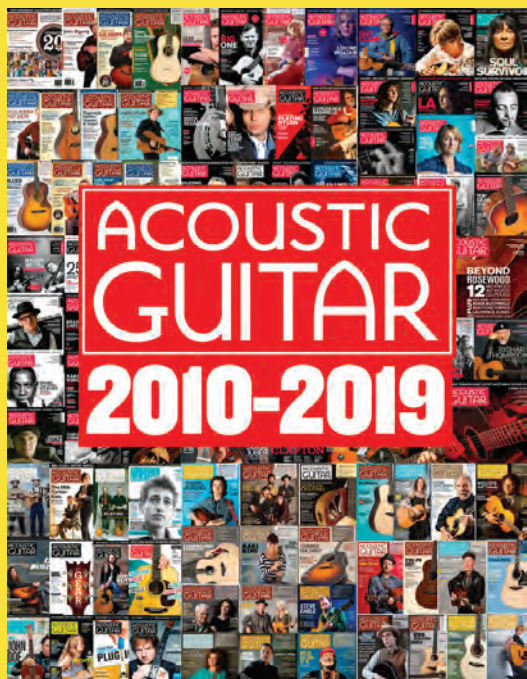
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# 5 Tips on Using Arpeggios

Learn to play the broken chords that appear across the musical spectrum, from Baroque to classic rock

BY GRETCHEN MENN

## THE PROBLEM

You're having difficulty keeping a steady flow when playing arpeggios—chords played melodically, rather than harmonically, which serve the dual function of establishing harmony and its movements while also providing melodic contour and interest. Arpeggios can be valuable technical exercises, as well as great tools for accompaniment. You can employ this technique on Led Zeppelin's "Babe I'm Gonna Leave You," Steve Morse's "Tumeni Notes," and Pink Floyd's "Us and Them," among others.

## THE SOLUTION

Start with chord shapes you already know. Learn a handful of increasingly complex fingerstyle picking patterns and then begin incorporating arpeggios into your vocabulary. Both your rhythm and lead playing will benefit in the process, as will your compositional ability and overall musicianship.

### 1 START SLOWLY

Begin with your basic open-G chord, fretted with your second, first, and third fingers on strings 6, 5, and 1, respectively. Play the chord harmonically, as notated in bar 1 of **Example 1**, and then arpeggiated (bar 2). Fret the chord and leave it held in place. Play through each note, letting it ring out as you move on to the next one. Try bar 2 fingerstyle and with any other chords as well.

### 2 ADD A CHORD

Now play **Example 2**, which introduces another chord, E minor (the vi chord in the key



BILL EVANS

of G). Notice how you can hear the harmonic movement with the change of only one note (G major is G B D; E minor is E G B). In other words, B and G are common notes in both chords. It can be very effective to seek out smooth movement like this when playing chord progressions—arpeggiated or otherwise.

### 3 DELVE INTO SOME BASIC PICKING-HAND PATTERNS

For **Example 3** and its reverse pattern, **Example 4**, take the same two chords, G and E minor. Note that the picking-hand fingering is indicated in traditional format: *a* = ring finger, *m* = middle, *i* = index, *p* = thumb. Pay attention to the individual sounds of each string and to various strengths and weaknesses in your pick hand. If you're new to fingerstyle technique, you'll likely find your ring finger is weaker than your middle or index. Let your ears be the guide to finding balanced volume and tone.

### 4 MIX IT UP WITH MORE PATTERNS

In **Example 5**, notice that the chords are

the same as in exercises 2–4, but because of a change of melodic direction and the rhythmic placement of the lowest note, the arpeggios start to take on a more melodic quality.

**Example 6** extends the melodic workout introduced in Ex. 5 by introducing bass notes, played with the thumb, on the first and third beats of the measure. This adds fullness to the sound while helping reinforce the harmony.

### 5 BRING IN SOME BASS MOVEMENT

**Example 7** demonstrates moving bass notes against stationary chords, creating graceful harmonic movement that is also graceful to play with its open strings.

**Example 8** combines the picking-hand pattern and added bass notes of Ex. 6 and the chord progression of Ex. 7. The one addition is a D on the last beat of the second bar.

Once you've polished all of these examples, try some finger patterns of your own invention, as well as chord progressions that intrigue or move you. Create a new song, riff, solo, or symphony. The possibilities are endless.

AC



From the January 2017 issue of *Acoustic Guitar*



### Example 1

G

let ring throughout (all examples)

### Example 2

G

### Example 3

Em

G

Em

a m i p etc.

### Example 4

G

Em

p i m a etc.

### Example 5

G

Em

a m i p p i m i etc.

### Example 6

G

a m i p i m a m etc.

### Example 7

Em

G

G/F#

Em

C

C/B

Am7

p i m a etc.

### Example 8

G

G/F#

Em

C

C/B

Am7

D

a m i p i m a m etc.



# Pass It On

Learn to walk your jazz bass lines with chord accompaniment

BY RON JACKSON

While studying at Berklee College of Music in Boston in the mid-1980s, I had the honor of seeing jazz guitarist Joe Pass give a clinic. It was just him, his trusty Gibson ES-175 hollowbody, and a nylon-string acoustic. Pass made those guitars sound like a full band. He demonstrated chord melody, percussive tapping, virtuoso melodic solos, and—what really got me going—walking bass lines with chord accompaniment, or “comping.”

One of the best ways to learn how to play walking bass lines with chord accompaniment is to listen to jazz bassists. Another way is to understand how bass lines with chords developed. For that, you’ll need to start from where it all began—that is, with Django Reinhardt and Freddie Green of the Count Basie Orchestra. Reinhardt and Green paved the way to playing walking bass lines on acoustic guitar with the chord shapes they used while comping in band settings. You can begin by listening to their music. After that, you’ll be ready for this Weekly Workout.

In all of the examples, I have used the same chord shape and fingering, while progressively adding a walking bass line and comping pattern for subsequent weeks. Pay strict attention to the fingerings.

Use a metronome and set the tempo at about 50 bpm. Practice so that the click is on beats two and four. This imitates the hi-hat in a jazz drum kit, and will give the music a swing feel. I suggest counting the 1 and 3 between the clicks so you will be able to catch the 2 and 4. If that’s too difficult, just play on the quarter note starting at 100 bpm. I recommend using a medium standard pick.

## WEEK ONE

To perform walking bass lines with chords, first learn the three-note chord voicing commonly used on guitar in big bands and mainstream swing: the root, third, and seventh of the chord. For a G7 chord, the notes will be



TANIA PALOWEQUE

G, B, and F, omitting the fifth, or D. One G7 voicing is the G root on the sixth string, third fret; the F (which is the flat seventh note of the chord, written  $\flat 7$ ) on the fourth string, third fret; and the B (the third note of the chord) on the third string, fourth fret.

That chord form and its accompaniment (or, comping) is known as the “Freddie Green” style. To begin understanding this style, first familiarize yourself with these three chord voicings.

The dominant seventh chord, which has the chord intervals 1, 3, 5,  $\flat 7$ . For example, in a G7 chord, the notes are G, B, D, and F.

The minor seventh chord, which has the chord intervals 1,  $\flat 3$ , 5,  $\flat 7$ . For example, in an Amin7 chord, the notes are A, C, E, and G.

The diminished seventh chord, which has the chord intervals 1,  $\flat 3$ ,  $\flat 5$ ,  $\flat 7$ . For example, in a C $\sharp$ dim7 chord, the notes are C $\sharp$ , E, G, B $\flat$ .

Use this week to learn the jazz-blues chord progression in the key of G. It’s crucial that you commit to memory these chord shapes on the fingerboard, as well as the chord progression. These shapes will be used throughout the workout.

Below is the formula for a jazz-blues in roman numerals. Roman numerals are used so you can transpose this chord progression

to any key, but memorize this chord progression in the key of G.

I7	Iv7	I7	II-7-V7of IV
Iv7	$\sharp$ Ivdim7	I7	II-7-V7of II
II-7	V7	I7 V7of II	IIm7-V7of I

Use all downstrokes on this exercise. Practice muting the unused strings and accent the two and four of each measure. Use the exact fingerings. Once you master and memorize the shapes, you will come up with your own fingerings. When strumming, make sure that you do not strum too hard. Your strums should be smooth. Practice until you can smoothly change between chords.

## Beginners' Tip #1

Practice your bass lines with a swing feel by setting the click of your metronome as beats two and four. This imitates the hi-hat on the drum set so you can get into the groove. A walking bass line fills in the time so well that you don't even need a drummer!



Excerpted from the  
December 2014 issue  
of *Acoustic Guitar*





## Beginners' Tip #2

Play the bass note on every quarter note, or beat, to create a sense of “walking.”

### WEEK TWO

It's time to add the most basic bass line: the quarter note on every four beats on the root of each chord. The easiest bass line is to play the root on every beat. Walking bass lines are almost always played as quarter notes—something known as four to the floor—and this is how you begin to create them. You also almost always play the bass notes on the fifth and sixth strings. If you try to play the bass note on the fourth string, you will be out of the bass register. Finally, you also will usually play the third and seventh of the chord on the third or fourth strings.

In Week One, you played the bass note with the third and seventh as one chord. Now, separate the bass note root from the third and seventh and create two parts. Your right hand will become very important now, because you will be using the right hand to play the two parts. This is in the realm of fingerpicking, but on a very basic level.

For this exercise, I recommend you use hybrid picking, holding the pick with your first finger and thumb to play the bass notes, and using second and third fingers to pluck the two-note third-and-seventh chord voicing. Make sure that you accent the two and four. Practice the bass line so that it sounds smoothly connected (*legato*) and hold the chords for their full time value.

Your ultimate goal is to sound like you are playing two separate parts.

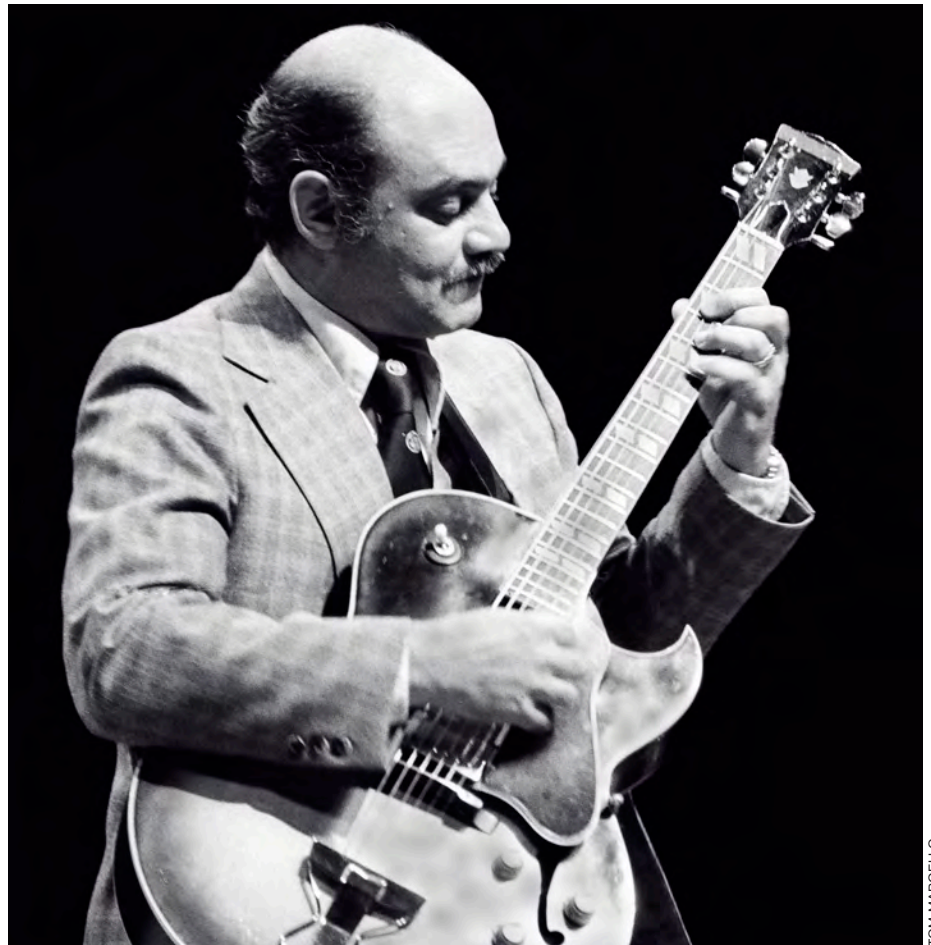
### WEEK THREE

Now, you will add a real walking bass line in quarter notes with the third and seventh chord voicing playing a half note on the first and second beats, again creating two different parts. You will begin to work on the independence of both your fretting and picking hands. Practice these two parts separately—first, the bass line, then the chords—and then put them together.

## Beginners' Tip #3

Bass players use open strings all the time when walking their bass lines. Do the same on your acoustic guitar.

Joe Pass with his Gibson ES-175



TOM MARCELLO

Learn this walking bass line using the fingerings on the music. These specific fingerings were written to work with the chords. Notice how the walking bass line connects each chord. Also notice how I throw in an occasional open A string. Jazz bass players play open strings all the time when they walk their bass lines. It gives them a break from pressing the frets or fingerboard. Remember: always accent the bass notes on the two and four to keep that swing feel happening.

Next, practice the two-note third-and-seventh voicing. Remember the fingerings of these notes and how they fit in the chord progression. If you were to play these two-note chords in a band jamming on the blues in G, they would fit perfectly.

Now, put it all together, paying strict attention to the fingerings.

### WEEK FOUR

This week, with the same walking bass line, play the third and seventh on top, syncopated. This requires even more independence of the fretting and picking hands. The syncopated rhythm for the third and seventh in this example is called the Charleston rhythm (listen

to Django Reinhardt's version of the song “Charleston” from the *Quintette du Hot Club de France* album). The Charleston rhythm is a very common comping pattern in jazz.

Once you master this rhythm, put it together with the bass line. The tricky part is to mix the syncopated chords with the walking bass line. Pay special attention to where the bass notes and chord rhythms fall into place. When you've practiced it to perfection, you'll sound like a full swing band on guitar.

*This lesson also appears in the AG book Chords at Your Fingertips, available at [store.acoustic-guitar.com](http://store.acoustic-guitar.com).*

## Beginners' Tip #4

The goal of playing walking bass lines is to accompany yourself or others. Avoid playing a walking bass line when you're playing with a bassist, unless he or she takes a solo and you ask permission.



WEEK 3

Chord diagrams for Week 3:

- G7: 1x24xx
- C7: x324xx
- G7: 1x24xx
- Dm7: x314xx
- G7: 1x24xx
- C7: x324xx
- C#dim7: x312xx

Musical notation for Week 3:

Staff 1 (Treble Clef):

Staff 2 (Bass Clef):

Staff 3 (Bass Clef):

Chord diagrams for Week 3 (continued):

- G7: 1x24xx
- Bm7: 2x34xx 7 fr.
- E7: x214xx 6 fr.
- Am7: 2x34xx
- D7: x324xx
- G7: 1x24xx
- E7: x214xx 6 fr.
- Am7: 2x34xx
- D7: x324xx

Musical notation for Week 3 (continued):

Staff 1 (Treble Clef):

Staff 2 (Bass Clef):

Staff 3 (Bass Clef):

WEEK 4

Chord diagrams for Week 4:

- G7: 1x24xx
- C7: x324xx
- G7: 1x24xx
- Dm7: x314xx
- G7: 1x24xx
- C7: x324xx
- C#dim7: x312xx

Musical notation for Week 4:

Staff 1 (Treble Clef):

Staff 2 (Bass Clef):

Staff 3 (Bass Clef):

Chord diagrams for Week 4 (continued):

- G7: 1x24xx
- Bm7: 2x34xx 7 fr.
- E7: x214xx 6 fr.
- Am7: 2x34xx
- D7: x324xx
- G7: 1x24xx
- E7: x214xx 6 fr.
- Am7: 2x34xx
- D7: x324xx

Musical notation for Week 4 (continued):

Staff 1 (Treble Clef):

Staff 2 (Bass Clef):

Staff 3 (Bass Clef):





# Big Yellow Taxi

A Joni Mitchell classic in open-E tuning

BY ANDREW DUBROCK

“Big Yellow Taxi” was the sole single from Joni Mitchell’s 1970 album, *Ladies of the Canyon*. Though it didn’t crack the Top 40 (it charted at No. 67 on the *Billboard* singles chart), that doesn’t accurately reflect its success. Covered by plenty of other acts—including Bob Dylan, Amy Grant, and, more recently, Counting Crows—“Big Yellow Taxi” became one of Mitchell’s most popular songs.

Mitchell recorded the song in open-E tuning. If you’re concerned about tuning your fifth, fourth, and third strings up to B, E, and G#, respectively, tune down to open D and put a capo on the second fret. This will relieve

strain on both your strings and your guitar’s neck. Strum quietly through the first half of each chorus, using Strum Pattern 2. Mitchell’s verse strumming pattern (Pattern 1) relies on a bit of string damping to keep things percussively moving forward. For the Xs in the strum pattern, lift your fretting-hand fingers enough to dampen the strings, and strum through the dampened strings to create a percussive “chuck” sound. Try the intro to sound more like the recording, and add sections from the last four bars of the intro riff to the ends of each verse phrase to emulate Mitchell’s fills throughout.

AG



From the November  
2006 issue of  
*Acoustic Guitar*

## GUITAR FOUNDATION OF AMERICA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION & COMPETITION

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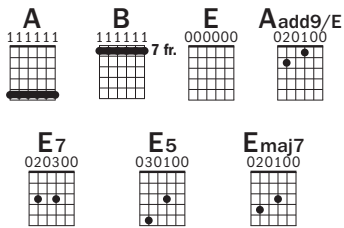
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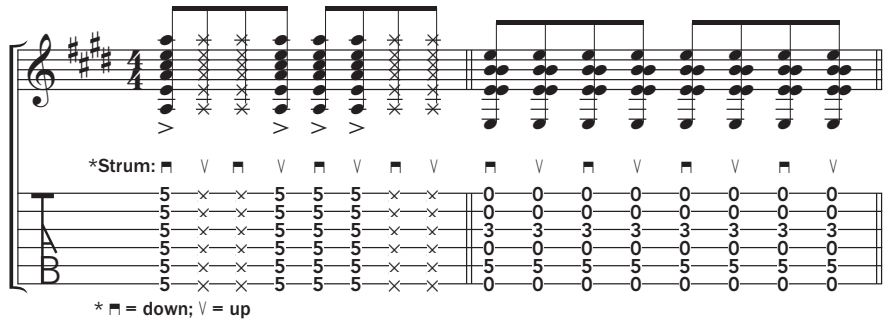
Tuning: E B E G# B E

## Chords

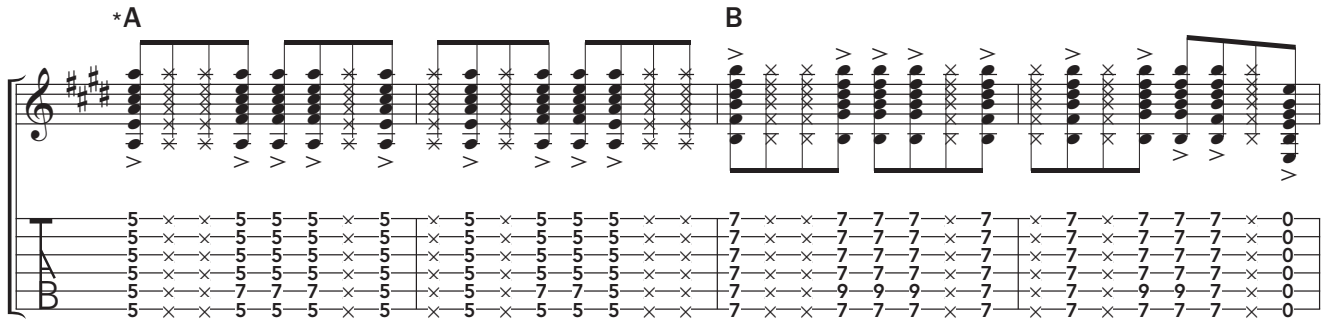


## Strum Pattern 1

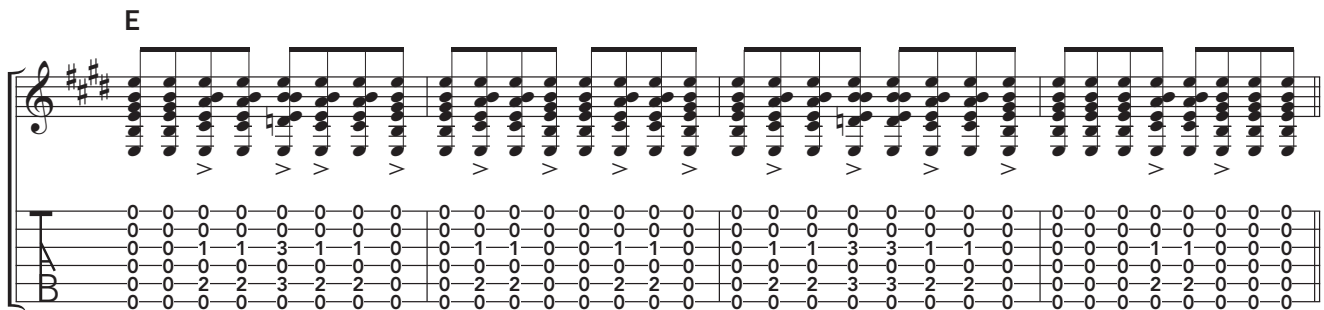
## Strum Pattern 2



## Intro Riff



\*Chord symbols depict basic harmony.



1. **A** They paved paradise, put up a parking lot  
**A** With a pink hotel, **B** a boutique, and **E** a swinging hot spot

## Chorus

**E5** Don't it always seem to go

**Aadd9/E** That you don't know what you've got till it's gone

**A** They paved paradise, put up a parking lot

2. **A** They took all the trees, put 'em in a tree museum  
**A** And they charge the people a dollar and a half just to see 'em

## Repeat Chorus

3. **A** Hey farmer, farmer, put away that DDT now  
**A** Give me spots on my apples but leave me the birds  
**E** And the bees, please

## Repeat Chorus

4. **A** Late last night I heard the screen door slam  
**A** And a big yellow taxi took away my old man

## Repeat Chorus (x2)

**A** They paved paradise, put up a parking lot  
**A** They paved paradise, put up a parking lot



# House of the Rising Sun

Tony Rice's spontaneous rendition of a traditional favorite

BY CRAIG HAVIGHURST



Tony Rice

The Tony Rice Unit's take on "House of the Rising Sun," recorded on *Unit of Measure*, was utterly impromptu. "If we would have done another take of it, it would have been totally different," Tony Rice says. The guitarist's solo introduction takes liberties with harmony, melody, and tempo. Indeed, melody takes a back seat to building a line that serves to tie

together warm and original chord voicings. Rice doesn't often use his middle and ring fingers on his picking hand, but he does here in measures 6, 8, 13, 16, 42, and 43, occasionally snapping the strings for a fine percussive effect. The band joins him for several choruses at a slow pace and then kicks into several passes at an uptempo bluegrass groove. **AG**



From the June 2002 issue of *Acoustic Guitar*

## HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN

TRADITIONAL

Free time

Guitar 1

Am9 Cadd9 D/A Fmaj7/A

E7#9 Am9 Cadd9 Bm11b5

E Am

This transcription copyright © 2002 String Letter Publishing.

12

Cadd9 D/A F/A Am E

3 3 5 0 1 5 5 5 5 9 7 6 7 6 7

3 3 5 0 1 5 5 5 5 9 7 6 7 6 7

3 3 5 0 1 5 5 5 5 9 7 6 7 6 7

3 3 5 0 1 5 5 5 5 9 7 6 7 6 7

The image shows a musical score for the song "The Sound of Silence" by Simon & Garfunkel. The score is written for guitar and bass. The guitar part is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (Bb). The bass part is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (Bb). The score includes a capo on the 1st fret and a key signature change to one sharp (F#) for the final section. The guitar part includes a "harm." (harmonic) section and a "3" (triple) section. The bass part includes a "3" (triple) section. The score is divided into two systems, each with a key signature change and a capo change.

**System 1:**

- Chords:** Am9, D/A, E/A, D11, Am9.
- Key Signature:** One flat (Bb).
- Capo:** 1st fret.
- Time Signature:** 4/4.
- Measure 17:** Starts with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature.
- Measure 18:** Features a harmonic (harm.) and a triple (3).
- Measure 19:** Features a triple (3).

**System 2:**

- Chords:** Am9, Am13.
- Key Signature:** One sharp (F#).
- Capo:** 2nd fret.
- Time Signature:** 4/4.
- Measure 20:** Starts with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature.
- Measure 21:** Features a triple (3).
- Measure 22:** Features a triple (3).

**Fiddle Solo**      **Mandolin Solo**      **Guitar 1 Solo**

♩ = 93 (♩ = ♪<sup>3</sup>♪)

21

16 15

Am C

3 3

4/5 5 5 4/5 3 3 5 7 7/9 8 10-7

55

D/A F Am C

harm.

8 9 8 7 5 7 5 6 5 8 5 8 5 6 7 7 7 5/7 10 7 7



# HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN

**C<sub>sus2</sub> D F<sub>maj7</sub> Am**

62

**Free time E<sub>aug</sub> Am<sub>7</sub> D/A E/A Am<sub>9</sub> Fiddle Solo Guitar 2 Solo**

66

$\text{♩} = 135$

**Mandolin Solo Guitar 1 Solo**

100

**E<sub>m</sub> Am D F**

**A<sub>m</sub> C B<sub>m7</sub><sup>b5</sup> E<sub>m</sub>**

120

**A<sub>m</sub> C D F**

124

*harm. - - -*

128 **Am** **E** **Am** **Bm/A** **C** **Bm**

*rit.*

Fingerings: 3, 5, 0, 7, 5, 7, 6, 7, 7, 6, 0, 2, 0, 4, 3, 4, 5, 5, 3, 4, 4, 2.

134 **Am** **Bm** **C** **Bm** **Fiddle Solo** **Mandolin Solo** **Em**

16 7

Fingerings: 1, 2, 2, 0, 3, 4, 4, 2, 5, 5, 5, 3, 4, 4, 4, 2, 2, 0, 2.

### Guitar 1 Solo/Outro

162 **Am** **C** **D** **F**

Fingerings: 5, 3, 4, 5, 3, 4, 3, 5, 3, 5, 7, 7, 7, 5, 7, 5, 7, 6, 5, 3, 0, 3, 0, 1, 2, 0, 2, 0, 1.

### Free time

166 **Am** **Eaug** **Am7** **D/A** **E/A**

*rit.*

Fingerings: 2, 0, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 2, 1, 2, 0, 5, 5, 5, 0, 3, 2, 4, 5, 4, 6, 6.

170 **Am9** **D11** **Am7** **Am13**

*harm.*

Fingerings: 12, 12, 12, 0, 3, 5, 3, 0, 3, 0, 2, 0, 0, 2, 5, 0, 0, 2, 5, 0, 5.





# Minuet in D Minor, BWV Anh. 132

Playing Bach on steel-string guitar

BY TEJA GERKEN

Every guitarist should learn to play a little Bach. Considered one of the greatest composers of all time, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) defines the Baroque style, and his contrapuntal and motivic writing was revolutionary at the time.

Bach wrote the “Minuet in D Minor” as part of a collection of compositions known as

*Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach*. Originally written for harpsichord, the piece has been frequently transcribed for guitar, and I first came across it arranged in dropped-D tuning. I began experimenting with this DADGAD arrangement for a workshop titled “Classical Guitar for Steel-String Players” that I taught at the 2011 Healdsburg Guitar Festival.

I discovered that while DADGAD didn’t really free up any more useful open strings (as alternate tunings often do), the tuning did allow for more economy of motion, leading to a more fluid sound that works well with the added sustain of a steel-string guitar.

If you’re used to more pattern-based finger-style techniques, this will be a good introduction



Johann Sebastian Bach

to developing greater finger freedom. This arrangement leans heavily on the contrasting melody and bass lines, with just enough harmony thrown in (as in measures 3, 5, and 11) to give a sense of Bach’s magic. It isn’t meant to be the ultimate in accurate readings of the piece, but it is a fun introduction to Bach’s works that’s playable without much classical training—and enjoyable to listen to!

AC



From the January  
2012 issue of  
*Acoustic Guitar*

## Performers Needed For the San Francisco Bay Area!

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# MINUET IN D MINOR

MUSIC BY JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Tuning: D A D G A D

First system of musical notation (measures 1-4). The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 3/4 time signature. The bottom staff is in tenor clef. The notation includes a key signature change to D minor (two flats) at the beginning. The guitar tablature below the bottom staff shows fret numbers for each measure.

Second system of musical notation (measures 5-8). The notation includes a first ending bracket labeled '1.' and a second ending bracket labeled '2.'. The guitar tablature continues below the bottom staff.

Third system of musical notation (measures 9-13). The notation includes a key signature change to D major (no sharps or flats) at measure 10. The guitar tablature continues below the bottom staff.

Fourth system of musical notation (measures 14-17). The notation includes a key signature change to D minor (two flats) at measure 15. The guitar tablature continues below the bottom staff.



Big Bill Broonzy with his 1920s Gibson Style O



# Baby, Please Don't Go

Learn Big Bill Broonzy's classic treatment of a traditional number

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

Few tunes enjoy as prominent a status in the blues canon as “Baby, Please Don’t Go,” popularized by Big Joe Williams, who first recorded it in 1935. The tune has since been interpreted by Lightnin’ Hopkins, Big Bill Broonzy, and Muddy Waters, among other blues heavyweights. A durable number, it’s also seen re-interpretations by rock groups including Them (with a 19-year-old Van Morrison on vocals), the Amboy Dukes, AC/DC, and Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.

“Baby, Please Don’t Go” is thought to have originated with “Long John”—a work song with lyrics centered on the yearning for an

escape from bondage. As rendered by Big Joe Williams, the song expresses a prisoner’s great anxiety about his lover taking off while he’s incarcerated.

Big Bill Broonzy’s 1952 recording is the source of this arrangement. Like most numbers, it’s got a simple structure, built from the I, IV, and V chords (E, A7, and B7, respectively). An eight-bar intro (the last eight measures of a 12-bar blues in the key of E major) is followed by nine verses, each based on the eight-bar blues form. Meanwhile, a 12-bar blues interlude is slipped between the second and third verses, as well as the fourth and fifth. Note that Broonzy sometimes adds a couple of beats to a measure, to accommodate his vocals—a practice common among solo blues musicians not encumbered by ensemble duties.

Play the song with a capo at the third fret; all of the music sounds a minor third higher than written (what’s notated as A7 sounds as C7, etc.). Broonzy played with a thumbpick,

hammering away on the lower strings in steady quarter notes, indicated here in the down-stemmed notes. Though he probably intended to play just the root of each chord, he sometimes hit adjacent or inadvertent notes, as shown in the notation. Some of these notes, like the F# in bar 7, might not make a whole lot of sense from a textbook point of view, but lend character to the music. When you cop this bass part, be sure to use a bit of palm muting, for a driving, percussive effect.

Above the bass notes in the intro, Broonzy decorates the chords with little melodic bits whose notes are in close proximity to the chord grips. Pick this part with your index, middle, and ring fingers. If you have trouble playing the up- and down-stemmed notes at the same time, simply practice them independently, at a slow tempo, before combining them. Once you’ve learned these parts, use them as a basis for composing or improvising your own materials for the 12-bar interludes.

AC



From the November  
2014 issue of  
*Acoustic Guitar*

**Intro**

**Chords, Capo III**

**A7** **E** **B7**

- E**
1. Baby, please don't go  
Baby, please don't go  
Baby, please don't go back to New Orleans  
You know it hurts me so
  2. Babe, I'm way down here  
You know I'm way down here  
Babe, I'm way down here in old Rolling Fork  
Baby, please don't go
  3. Baby, please don't go  
Baby, please don't go  
Baby, please don't go back to New Orleans  
You know it hurts me so
  4. Babe, I'm way down here  
You know I'm way down here  
Babe, I'm way down here on old Parchman's Farm  
Baby, please don't go
  5. Baby, please don't go  
Baby, please don't go  
Baby, please don't go and leave me here  
You know it's cold out there
  6. Babe, I'm way down here  
You know I'm way down here  
Babe, I'm way down here on old Parchman's Farm  
Baby, please don't go
  7. You know it's cold down here  
Babe, it's cold down here  
Babe, it's cold down here on old Parchman's Farm  
Baby, please don't go
  8. Baby, please don't go  
Baby, please don't go  
Baby, please don't go and leave me here  
You know it's cold out there
  9. I'm half fed down here  
I'm half fed down here  
I'm half fed down here on old Parchman's Farm  
Baby, please don't go

*Guitar Interlude (over 12-bar blues in E)*

*Guitar Interlude (over 12-bar blues in E)*



# Blackbird

Learn Paul McCartney's distinctive guitar accompaniment to this Beatles gem

BY ANDREW DUBROCK

One summer day in 1968, Paul McCartney recorded "Blackbird" while John Lennon looped tape for "Revolution 9" in another studio. Though these tracks sound about as similar as Sting and Stravinsky, they ended up on the same album—the Beatles' self-titled double album (aka the "White Album").

McCartney's unusual fingerpick-and-strum technique gives "Blackbird" its distinctive sound. Try strumming across the strings with just your index finger and you'll get a sense of

McCartney's feel. Unlike a strum that uses your whole arm, these mini-strums are all done with your hand in the same place: your index finger moves from the base knuckle joining your finger to your hand.

Look at the first measure of "Blackbird" and see that McCartney grabs each note of the tenth intervals on the beat with his thumb and middle finger, filling in the upbeats with index-finger plucks. In measure 2, he slides all the way up to the tenth and 12th frets, grabs two strings again with his thumb and index finger, and does a quick index-finger strum—down and up—on the second half of beat 1. He then plucks the G note on the tenth fret of the A string with his thumb and follows that with a quick index-finger strum—this time going up before coming back down. He repeats this pattern for the second half of the measure.



Paul McCartney

Once you get these two measures down, you'll have the right-hand technique you need to play the whole song.

Aside from that slide up to the tenth fret in measure 2, the trickiest left-hand maneuver is in measures 5 and 7, where you have to alternate between the E and B strings for the high melody notes. Try fingering these sections the way they're notated, and practice them carefully on their own if you need to. **AG**



From the July  
2005 issue of  
*Acoustic Guitar*

## BLACKBIRD

WORDS AND MUSIC BY JOHN LENNON AND PAUL MCCARTNEY

### Intro

♩ = 93

G Am7 G/B G

### Verse

G Am7 G/B

1., 2., 3. Black-bird sing-ing in the dead of

m i m i m p m i i p i i m i i p i

0 1 0 3 12 12 12 12 12 12 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1 0 3

3 0 2 10 10 10 10 3 0 2

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4 **G** **C** **C<sup>#</sup>m7<sup>b</sup>5** **Dadd4** **D<sup>#</sup>aug**

night, { (1., 3.) take these bro - ken wings \_\_\_\_ and learn to fly. \_\_\_\_  
(2.) take these sunk - en eyes \_\_\_\_ and learn to see. \_\_\_\_

6 **Em** **E<sup>b</sup>** **Dadd4** **C<sup>#</sup>m7<sup>b</sup>5** **C** **Cm**

All your life, \_\_\_\_

9 **G/B** **A7** **D7sus4** **G** **To Coda 2**

you were on - ly wait - ing for the mo - ment { (1., 3.) to a - rise. \_\_\_\_  
(2.) to be free. \_\_\_\_

11 **1.** **C** **G/B** **A7** **D7sus4** **G** **2. Bridge** **Fadd2** **Em** **Dm(add4)** **C**

Black - bird \_\_\_\_ fly, \_\_\_\_



14 **B $\flat$ 6** **C** **Fadd2** **Em** **Dm(add4)** **C** **B $\flat$ 6** **A7**

black - bird fly in - to the light

**To Coda 1** **Interlude**

17 **Dm11** **G/D** **G** **Am7** **G/B** **G**

of the dark black night.

20 **C** **C $\sharp$ m7 $\flat$ 5** **Dadd4** **D $\sharp$ aug** **Em** **E $\flat$**  **Dadd4** **C $\sharp$ m7 $\flat$ 5** **C**

23 **Cm** **G/B** **A7add4** **D7sus4** **G** **D.S. al Coda 1**



## ⊕ Coda 1

26

G A<sup>m</sup>7 G/B G

— night.

0 1 3 12-12-12 12-12-12-12-12-12 12-12-12 12-12-12-12-12-12

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

3 0 2 10 10 10 10 10 10 10

***D.S.S. al Coda 2***

## ⊖ Coda 2

32 **C** **G/B** **A7add4** **D7sus4** **G**

You were on - ly — wait - ing for this mo - ment to a - rise. —

0 3 0 2 0 2 0 2 | 1 1 1 1 0 0 0 0

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 | 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

3 2 0 0 0 0 3 3

34

C G/B A7add4 D7sus4 G

*rit.*

You were on - ly wait - ing — for this mo - ment to a - rise. —

*rit.*

0 3 0 2 0 2 0 2 1 1 1 1 0 3  
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0  
3 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 3



# I Am a Man of Constant Sorrow

A guitar-and-voice arrangement as heard in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

BY CRAIG HAVIGHURST

“I Am a Man of Constant Sorrow” acts as something of a theme song in the film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*. It reflects the dissatisfaction that drives the Homer-inspired hero on his odyssey, and it’s the song that

launches the quixotic career of the fictional Soggy Bottom Boys. This classic American folk song has antecedents that trace back over 200 years. According to John Garst, writing in the 2002 *Country Music Annual* (University of Kentucky Press), the earliest published precursor is an 1846 hymn called “Tender Hearted Christian.” The seminal recorded version of “I’m a Man of Constant Sorrow” was made by Kentuckian Emory Arthur in 1928. Close variations have been recorded by Bob Dylan, the Stanley Brothers, Tony Furtado, Jerry Garcia, and many others. This solo-acoustic-guitar-with-voice take, one of



four versions on the Grammy-winning *O Brother* soundtrack [including an instrumental by guitarist Norman Blake —ed.], is more modern than any strict 1930s reading of the song would have been. The dropped-D drone and pentatonic licks give it a tipsy Celtic edge as well as Mississippi Delta soul. **AG**



From the September 2002 issue of *Acoustic Guitar*

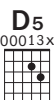
## I AM A MAN OF CONSTANT SORROW

TRADITIONAL

Tuning: D A D G B E, Capo III

Intro

♩ = 174




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# Verse

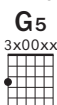


9

1. I am a man of con - stant

2.-5. See additional lyrics

1/4



13

sor-row. I've seen trou - ble all my



17

days. I bid fare -

1/4



21

well to old Ken - tuck - y, the place where I

1/4

# I AM A MAN OF CONSTANT SORROW

**A<sub>sus2</sub>**  
x01200

**D<sub>5</sub>**  
00013x

25

was born and raised. The place where

**A<sub>5</sub>**  
x011xx

**1.-4.**  
**D<sub>5</sub>**  
00013x

29

he was born and raised.

**5.**  
**D<sub>5</sub>**  
00013x

33

shore.

2. For six long years I've been in trouble  
No pleasure here on earth I've found  
For in this world I'm bound to ramble  
I have no friends to help me now  
(He has no friends to help him now)

3. It's fare thee well my own true lover  
I never expect to see you again  
For I'm bound to ride that northern railroad  
Perhaps I'll die upon this train  
(Perhaps he'll die upon this train)

4. You can bury me in some deep valley  
For many years where I may lay  
Then you may learn to love another  
While I am sleeping in my grave  
(While he is sleeping in his grave)



5. Maybe your friends think  
I'm just a stranger my face you never will see no more  
But there is one promise that is given  
I'll meet you on God's golden shore  
(He'll meet you on God's golden shore)



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# Buzz Stop

Troubleshooting unwanted sounds on acoustic guitar

BY DANA BOURGEOIS

**Q:** My 1983 Martin HD-28 has a buzzing or rattling high E string. The rest of the strings sound great. A local fellow worked on the frets and smoothed them out and it plays well other than this annoying rattle. What in your view is the most likely cause?  
—Gerry Laverty, Richmond, Virginia

**A:** It can be vexingly difficult to diagnose string buzz. Here's a list of ten possible causes that I look for. If this checklist doesn't identify the problem, I sometimes resort to offering sacrifices to the guitar gods.

## 1 LOW NUT SLOT

This typically causes problems on the open note, but can sometimes create buzzing between the nut and a fretted note. If you suspect the latter, play the fretted note and then damp the string between the nut and the fret while the note is still ringing. If the buzz goes away, you may need a new nut or "nut implant."

## 2 IMPROPERLY SHAPED NUT SLOT

A string that bears too heavily on the middle or the back of the nut slot can buzz in a sitar-like way on the front of the slot. This can be corrected with a couple of well-directed strokes of a nut file.

## 3 IMPROPER SADDLE CONTACT

Same issue as above, only at the saddle. This occurs most often on taller saddles having acute string-break angles.



COURTESY OF MARTIN GUITARS

## 4 BAD STRINGS

Buzzing can sometimes result from windings that have come loose from their core. I have even seen new, obviously defective strings with this problem.

## 5 TOUCHING STRINGS

No two strings should touch in the area around the tuner posts. Custom nut spacing, replacement tuners, and oddball string gauges are the usual culprits.

## 6 BOUNCING FRETS

An improperly seated fret can elude accurate leveling, then bounce back up and continue causing buzzing problems. Super glue and a little spot dressing can get you to your next full fret replacement.

## 7 NECK TOO STRAIGHT

The physics of string oscillation dictates that fretboards should rarely be straight and never bowed backward. Ideal fretboard shape depends on scale length, string gauge, playing

style, and other factors. A good tech can optimize your guitar for your style and playing preferences, but cannot change the laws of physics. Sometimes you just need more relief.

## 8 LOOSE JOINT

A loose brace, bridge, binding joint, nut, or any ill-fitting part can cause vibration sympathetic to a specific note. I hunt for loose joints by damping strings and tapping around the entire guitar. The fix is often easier than the diagnosis.

## 9 LOOSE PICKUP

This sympathetic vibration merits a category of its own. The problem is often a loose cable which can be detected by damping the strings and shaking the guitar. Recently, I found buzzing related to a loose jack cover.

## 10 SYMPATHETIC TRUSS ROD

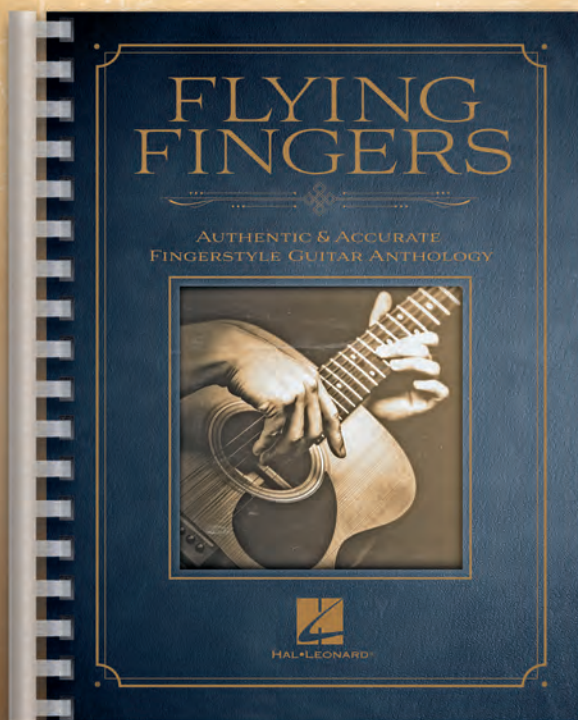
Think of the truss rod as a big guitar string that can be tuned to a note that's either sympathetic or not sympathetic to a significant resonant frequency. You get the picture. **AG**



Excerpted from the  
April 2014 issue of  
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A guide to determining (and justifying) your need for multiple guitars BY MICHAEL MILLHAM

# Is One Guitar Enough?



JONAH DE OLIVEIRA

**M**ore than any other readily available instrument, guitars come in a vast array of shapes, sizes, designs, timbres, and intended uses. While many guitarists get along perfectly well with only one guitar, there are also good reasons (Guitar Acquisition Syndrome aside) to invest in a new instrument. Some players may be looking for a different set of features, such as a shorter scale or wider nut, to make certain techniques easier. Others may be looking for a specific tonal quality that is not available from the guitar at hand, or for an instrument more suited to a different playing style or musical genre. And performers will find that having another guitar on hand can facilitate fluid sets by minimizing time otherwise spent tuning.

Ultimately, players must ask themselves, “Can a new instrument enable me to easily do something I can’t do now?” Answering “no” doesn’t necessarily preclude a purchase—the world is full of collectors of specific guitars or guitar types—but “yes” may well mean that it is time to seriously consider another guitar. Ideally, a new ax should fulfill an unmet need so that it doesn’t end up as an unused piece of gear that’s sold somewhere down the road. Keeping this problem-solving approach in mind can ensure that your new instrument will become a valued and much-used part of your musical arsenal.

#### A PERFECT MATCH

The stars seem to align for some fortunate players who find the perfect guitar for their music. Such a player/guitar matchup often results in a signature sound that suits a specific style.

Tony Rice and his 1935 Martin D-28, for example, are a match made in bluegrass heaven. Old-time picker David Rawlings finds similar bliss with his 1935 Epiphone archtop; Britain’s Martin Carthy played his Martin 000-18 at every gig for almost four decades; and countless classical specialists use a single concert guitar. For generalist players who cover a variety of playing styles, however, having multiple guitars can be a real asset.

#### SUIT YOUR STYLE

While a skilled, determined picker can make just about any guitar work for any tune, solo, or song, different guitar designs produce

unique tones. And a guitar that’s notably different from what you’re used to can help you to develop your skills in a new way or adapt them more easily to a new style.

A fingerstyle steel-string player who wants to explore jazz chord-melodies might find it easier and more interesting to begin those explorations on a nylon-string, with its mellow tones that can make complex jazz chords sound more at home. Similarly, a D-28—toting singer-songwriter might take advantage of the faster decay of an archtop to master the subtle phrasing of a jazz standard. A steel-string might be the ticket for a classical player who wants to get better acquainted with Celtic music that might reinforce and enhance a classical repertoire.

#### AN AX FOR EVERY TUNING

In theory, a player who worked in multiple tunings could buy a decent electronic tuner and take a minute between songs to change tunings without upsetting the flow of a show or their practice routine too much. But the fact is many tunings won’t stay in tune using strings intended for standard tuning. Dropping down to C, for instance, can render a lighter string incapable of holding its pitch.

Anyone whose performance (or even home practice) includes alternate tunings will find that an additional guitar can save a lot of time and headaches. “For me, that’s the whole reason to take more than one guitar on the road—the tuning thing,” says

Dorian Michael, a California picker who plays blues, fingerstyle, and bluegrass. “I can easily grab different guitars for different keys without a lot of hassle and keep the show moving.”

Certain body styles also work better for certain tunings. A deep or large-bodied guitar like a dreadnought or jumbo, which projects well and is bass-responsive, is a great choice for dropped tunings and makes a great complement to a medium-size OM or grand concert strung up in standard tuning. This approach works for Montana-based singer-songwriter John Floridis, who uses a Taylor 815c jumbo for this purpose. “I keep in a low-C tuning,” he explains. “It’s actually a C9 with no third—all Cs and Gs with a

D on top and it works great for slide and bluesy stuff, as well as some songs.”

#### BODIES AND BUILDS

Floridis is among the many players who contend that “there’s probably a song in every guitar.” And if you spend a day playing five different types of guitars, each constructed with a different wood combination, you can understand why. The projection of a certain body type, how a given wood resonates, the feel of the neck in your hand, and how the body feels when you sit down to play—these all contribute to the way you play.

Body styles also affect your tone—particularly the amount of focus and/or overtone content. Jumbos and dreadnoughts lend volume to spare and excellent bass response, while OM and other smaller bodies—like concert, grand auditoriums, and 000s—tend toward softer, more balanced, and controlled volume and tone.

Wood choice, too, is critical to tone and vibe. The classic combination of a spruce top and rosewood back and sides makes use of spruce’s clarity and brightness and rosewood’s highly reflective properties to impart a snappy, boisterous tone that really projects when strummed and cuts through a mix when played fingerstyle.

Other woods used for tops include cedar, a softer wood known for its excellent warm tones and responsiveness to nuanced, dynamic playing, and mahogany, which, while less responsive and touch-sensitive, tends to deliver exceptionally bluesy tones.

Wood types used for the backs and sides of guitars are more numerous. As commonly seen as rosewood, mahogany is known for its strong fundamentals and midrange. Other typical choices include mellow and bassy maple; bright, midrange-y koa; walnut, which falls somewhere between koa and maple tonally; and cherry, which tends toward the maple end of the spectrum. More specialized builders will sometimes use ornate, figured cocobolo, with its rosewood-like tonal qualities, and classical builders often use cypress.



From the October  
2007 issue of  
*Acoustic Guitar*



# STRING UP A SECOND GUITAR FOR ALTERNATE TUNING



MATT WALSH

One of the primary reasons for owning a second guitar is to facilitate the exploration of alternate tunings. And while it's easy enough to use the guitar you regularly keep in standard tuning for something like an exploration of dropped D, more esoteric tunings and those in lower registers may require a completely different approach to stringing.

In general, tunings that lower the pitch (relative to standard tuning) of two or more strings will be more stable when heavier strings are used. When using a tuning like open G, which drops the sixth, second, and first strings a whole step, an increase in string gauge of at least a hundredth of an inch (say, .12 to .13) on the first string and three to five hundredths on the fifth and sixth strings will stabilize the tuning and increase your guitar's volume. For tunings that drop the sixth string to C or C $\sharp$ , increasing the gauge yet another few hundredths lends the same advantages.

For tunings (like D modal) that not only drop the pitch by a whole step, but also

harmonize adjacent strings as doubles, you may prefer to use the same gauge for each string—which keeps volume and tension even and the strings more responsive to the touch. In these instances, you'll have to assemble custom string sets each time you change strings. And while you won't find such sets prepackaged by major manufacturers, most well-stocked music stores will sell you the individual strings necessary to put together the set you need.

Remember too, that any significant increase in string gauge will require a new setup for your ax, and in the most extreme cases may require re-slotting the nut or substantial truss-rod adjustments—all tweaks often best left to a professional. Given the labor-intensive nature of many of these alterations—and the very different feel that results from these setups—many players will find that exploration of a single alternate tuning merits the purchase of an ax singularly dedicated to that purpose.

—Charles Sauflay

Selecting the right combination of woods and body styles can give you a completely new tone experience. If you already have a spruce-and-mahogany OM for bluesy finger-picking, then a cedar-and-walnut small jumbo would come in handy for exploration of slow Irish aires.

In each case, the idea is to take a yin/yang approach and try to avoid duplicating tones. “It changes your mood,” states Michael Chapdelaine, who has famously won both fingerstyle championships and classical competitions. “You strap on a different guitar and it’s going to make you feel different—and that’s a great idea, especially in a show.”

## THE CASE FOR A SINGLE GUITAR?

The rationale for owning not just two, but many different guitars, is pretty easy to argue. It’s harder to make the case for a single guitar, especially for a gear-obsessed player. But if you are space constrained, frugal, or just not the collecting type, know that there are many players who have proven that a single, great guitar can go a long way.

Iconic player and composer Pierre Bensusan’s justification for a single instrument is as philosophical as it is practical. “We have to ask, ‘What about music?’,” says Bensusan, who played the same Lowden for two decades and now uses a Ryan signature model. “We have to find the nuance and the contrast and the opposition inside the music itself rather than, ‘You need a different sound, go to a different guitar.’ I try to get this universal approach to music with one guitar, to find the guitar, and once I have found that guitar which is neutral enough, that guitar will take me to musical places. And then I don’t miss another guitar.”

When asked what he looks for in a guitar that can do it all, Bensusan is insistent about thinking of the guitar as a tool for expression, rather than an object of desire. “It’s important to forget the sound and forget the guitar. It’s like when the sound engineer is doing a good job, it’s unnoticeable. You’re in direct touch with the music. When you condition yourself with one instrument, you are going to find many ways to have that one instrument speak differently.”

Michael Chapdelaine also understands the merit of working with a single, more versatile guitar. “I listen for a beautiful voice and a huge dynamic range,” he says. This sensibility led him to his current road guitar, a cedar/East Indian rosewood double-top OM by luthier Kevin Muiderman. Unusual for a steel-string, this guitar features a lattice of carbon





RUEL DEL JAMOROL

fiber on top of cedar bracing. “The idea comes from the classical builder world. The lattice and double top combine to give the strength of a traditional solid top, but with less mass for more volume and a quicker response to the lighter touch that classical players use,” says Muiderman. This innovative hybrid concept works for Chapdelaine: “I’ve got all I want at this point.”

#### ALL ABOUT THE SOUND

In the end, the guitar is a means for expressing what’s in every player’s head, heart, and ears. For a player devoted single-mindedly to country blues, for example, one worn, old Stella may truly be all that’s needed. More often than not, it’s the issue of suiting or faithfully capturing the essence of a style that necessitates a certain guitar type. And a player, professional or amateur, who wants to work across diverse styles, say flamenco and bluegrass, will probably seek out the instruments that express those styles most authentically.

Perhaps the best guidance, though, is that for all the talk about which guitar fits a certain style or player, there really are no rules. Guitars are about music and music is about feeling. And any guitar that enables the expression of that feeling is the right one—whether it’s one guitar or a dozen.

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## IS ONE GUITAR ENOUGH?



ANDREW NEEL

## MULTIPLE GUITARS ON THE ROAD

Frequent travelers have an excellent reason for owning multiple guitars. For instance, if you have a prized, high-ticket ax that you don't want to subject to the rigors of the road, another guitar that's somewhat less precious (or at least replaceable with one just like it) is a ticket to stress-free travel. Furthermore, many manufacturers now offer parlor guitars and even smaller travel instruments, which make splendid travel companions.

However, for performers, travel can also be the rationale for paring your onstage arsenal of instruments. When asked why he doesn't take both a steel- and a nylon-string guitar on the road, Michael Chapdelaine—who travels primarily by plane—is quick to cite logistical issues. "I can't stand carrying two guitars; it's painful just traveling with one. The issue at hand is not just being able to actually carry the entire load, but also avoiding extra baggage charges, which can add up if you can't fit the rest of your stuff into a carry-on bag."

For van-driving road warrior Dorian Michael (who spends about five months each year in the driver's seat), however, travel is his bread and butter, and he brings along several guitars. Michael has developed a workingman's relationship with his instruments and can't let transportation constraints bog him down. "I own a dozen guitars, but I don't have anything that's a repeat; everything is a tool for some purpose."



New bracing patterns, exacting reissues, modeling technology, and more from the last 30 years of gear innovation



# A Golden Age of Gear

30 years of trends and innovations in acoustic guitar design, amps, and accessories

BY DOUG YOUNG

When *Acoustic Guitar* published its first issue in 1990, it must have been hard to even imagine we'd be looking back from the futuristic date of 2020. Certainly no one could have predicted the astonishing events of 2020 alone, but there have been a lot of surprising changes in the guitar world over the three decades as well. Acoustic players are often characterized as having conservative tastes—after all, acoustic guitars are rooted in wood and nature. But that stereotype masks significant changes, including technological advances in everything from how guitars are built to how we listen to and create music. Today's acoustic guitars—and the music made on them—represent leaps into the future while keeping an eye on the past.

No one knows what the future holds, but the 30-year mark is a good time to look at some of the changes and recent directions. There are trends that we can recognize in hindsight, which might provide some clues to where the next three decades will take us.

## SHAPES OF THINGS

Guitars have come in many shapes and sizes for as long as they have existed, but the past decades have seen renewed interest in smaller instruments. OM's, grand concert, and even parlor-sized guitars compete with dreadnoughts in popularity. Taylor introduced its Grand Auditorium shape, with an optional cutaway in 1994. Although C.F. Martin & Co. made the Orchestra Model (OM) beginning in 1929, it didn't catch on at first, and was dropped from Martin's regular lineup until returning in 1990.

Many of today's players are opting for even smaller guitars like Taylor's GS Mini, Martin's LXM (Little Martin), and the Sheeran by Lowden series, along with 00- and 0-sized models in general. Some of these instruments are relatively inexpensive and convenient for travel, taking camping or to the beach, but there are higher-priced offerings, such as Collings' Baby series, Ryan Guitar's Abbey Grand Parlor, and Dontcho Ivanov's Snow Parlor. Advances in amplification have made the need for volume less important, allowing players to choose instruments based on other factors.

At the other extreme, players have discovered baritone guitars, even larger instruments which are typically tuned a fourth or fifth lower than usual. These provide a different tonality and are popular among singers with lower voices. Martin, Santa Cruz, Taylor, Alvarez, and other makers offer baritones as standard models.

While scale lengths between 24.9 and 25.5 inches remain typical for acoustic guitars, there have been explorations of both shorter and longer lengths. Players with smaller hands or those who prefer less tension often appreciate smaller-bodied guitars with shorter scale lengths. On the other hand, the popularity of alternate tunings has led some players to longer scale lengths, to support lower bass notes. Multi-scale designs (often known as "fan frets") offer the benefits of both. By angling the nut and saddle, with frets fanned out accordingly, the bass strings have more tension, better intonation, and more power, while maintaining, or even reducing the tension on the treble strings for easy playability.

Guitar makers have also experimented with structural elements inside the guitar. The X-brace design, originally developed by Martin, has long been the standard approach to top bracing, but builders are trying both new and old approaches as well. Perhaps the best-known example is Taylor's recent move to what it calls V-Class bracing. Other examples include PRS's hybrid X/ladder-bracing approach and Michael Greenfield's radial Tone Halo. And Ryan Guitars pairs a fairly traditional X-bracing pattern with a unique laser-cut brace style.

## ERGONOMICS AND PLAYABILITY

While playing the guitar isn't generally considered a dangerous activity, injuries due to repetitive stress and posture issues are not uncommon among musicians. Guitar makers have been responding with changes to make guitars easier to play as well as more ergonomic. Taylor largely led the charge in designing instruments with low action and easy-to-play necks, and today's guitars tend to be easier to play across the board than older generations. Plek (computerized fret-leveling machines) have





helped, by providing an automated way to dial in a perfect setup, allowing for lower action without buzzing. Lighter, more responsive builds also support lighter gauge strings, which are easier on the hands.

A bevel avoids cutting off circulation in a player's arm, and may also make a guitar feel smaller, allowing a lower shoulder position and making the instrument more comfortable to play. Originally developed by luthier Grit Laskin, bevels first appeared on custom guitars, but rapidly moved mainstream. Taylor, for example, offers bevels (Taylor Armrests) on most of their guitars, even the budget-priced Academy line. Some builders are adding additional bevels at other contact points, such as Laskin's "Rib Rest." Other luthiers are experimenting with different ways to make larger guitars more comfortable, including wedge-shaped bodies, inspired by an innovation that luthier Linda Manzer designed in 1984.

The Soundport is another increasingly popular feature, although still rare on production guitars. A small port on the side of the guitar, facing the player's ears, helps the performer hear the guitar better, without leaning over the guitar.

### SOMETHING OLD, OR SOMETHING NEW?

For many players, prewar Martins—meaning those made roughly between 1929 and 1940—are the holy grail of instruments. Why these guitars sound so good is a constant topic of debate, but many builders, from independent luthiers to larger manufacturers, try to capture the magic. Martin's Authentic line replicates the construction techniques of these vintage guitars, using hide glue, hand-scalloped braces, and torrefied woods. (Torrefaction is a process that involves heating the wood in a way that accelerates the aging process, allowing builders to construct a new guitar whose tone resembles that of a vintage instrument.) Similarly, Collings' Traditional series combines a lighter build, animal protein glue, and a thinner lacquer finish.

However, not all builders want to pursue the past, and many are exploring new techniques, materials, and tools. The use of CNC machines, laser cutters, and other advanced tooling has helped make it possible to produce high-tech masterpieces, and even relatively inexpensive instruments that are cosmetically near-perfect.

Guitar finishes are another area where the influence of the past coexists with current high-tech trends. Some manufacturers are using a UV-cured lacquer that is more durable than the traditional nitrocellulose lacquer. But at the same time, other guitar makers offer vintage

approaches that offer sonic advantages, like varnish and French polish.

### THE QUEST FOR ALTERNATIVE MATERIALS

Guitars have traditionally been built with spruce tops and mahogany or rosewood back and sides. Part of the appeal of coveted prewar examples comes from their use of Brazilian rosewood and Adirondack spruce. Brazilian rosewood and mahogany are now endangered species controlled by the CITES act, and Adirondack spruce is hard to source in the size needed for a guitar, forcing guitar makers to search for alternatives. Other varieties of spruce, such as Sitka, Englemann, and Alpine, have been substituted for tops, and the last few decades have seen the more common use of woods like cocobolo, macassar ebony, and ziricote for backs and sides.

In the search for sustainable and ecologically responsible wood choices, Taylor has launched its Urban Wood initiative, which leverages wood removed from the urban canopy in Southern California for some of its guitars. Taylor has also worked to provide a sustainable and legal source of ebony, another endangered wood, widely used for bridges and fretboards. Martin has used katalox, a very dense wood from Mexico for fretboards and bridges as an alternative to ebony.

However, there are reasons to be concerned about the sustainability of nearly all tonewoods, and there is growing interest in non-wood-based instruments. RainSong, Emerald, and Composite Acoustics are just a few of the companies making guitars entirely from carbon fiber. Guitarists who try carbon fiber guitars are often surprised by their tone, and the instruments have advantages for musicians who travel or live in humid climates. Martin and a few other companies have also been using High Pressure Laminate (HPL), a composite material made from paper and resin, which can be designed to look like wood. Like carbon fiber, HPL is fairly forgiving of heat, humidity, and doesn't scratch or dent like wood.

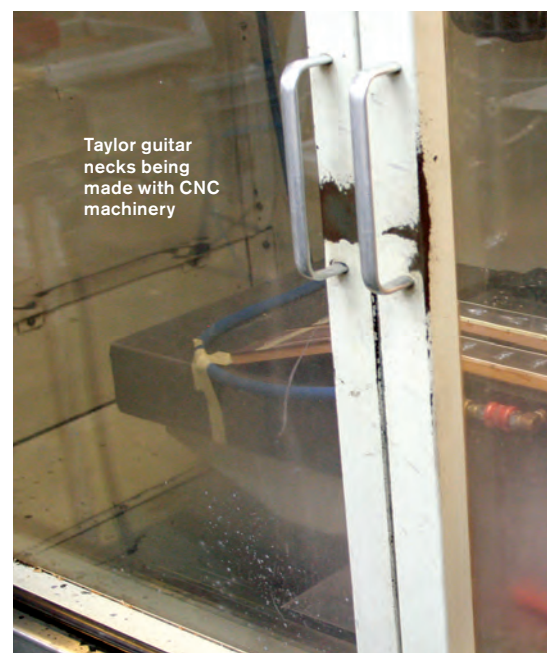
It seems likely that alternative materials, both synthetic components and non-traditional woods will become more prevalent over time simply out of necessity.

### GETTING HEARD

Acoustic guitarists have far more options for amplification today than 30 years ago. One of the more dramatic changes came in 2003 with the release of the Bose L1, which introduced the concept of a line array in a portable form, ushering in a new category of lightweight portable amplification. Meanwhile, for those

who prefer a full PA system, powered speakers keep getting lighter and more powerful, and digital mixers such as the QSC Touchmix, Behringer X Air, and Line 6 StageScape offer performers programmability, impressive effects, built-in multi-track recording, and even remote control via mobile devices.

Small combo amps have also become more powerful, lighter-weight, and feature-rich. While some manufacturers embrace digital technology with effects—some acoustic amps even include harmonizers and built-in loopers—others, like the Rivera and Humphrey, take a retro approach based on tube circuits. Effects pedals designed with acoustic guitar in



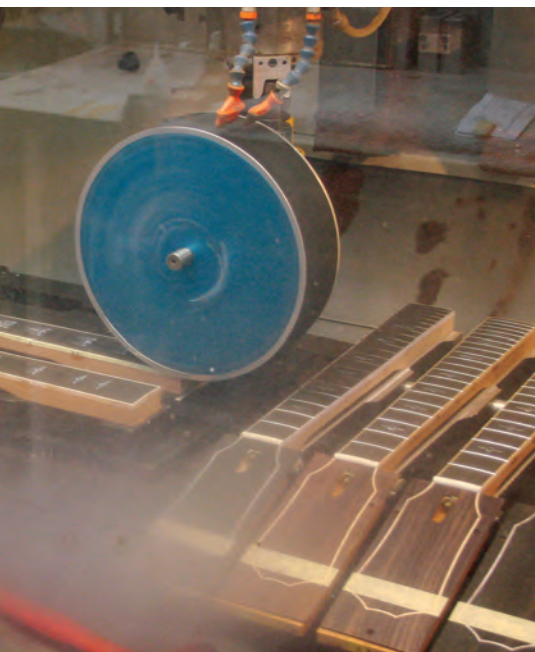
mind were relatively rare three decades ago, but today we have pedals with EQ, reverb, compression, and more that are tuned to the needs of acoustic players. Loopers are an especially interesting category.

The first commercial looper was the Lexicon JamMan, an expensive device introduced in the mid-1990s that provided only eight seconds of looping. Although used effectively by performers such as Phil Keaggy, it didn't flourish until advances in technology allowed an explosion of relatively inexpensive loopers that support hours of looping time, multiple loops and more. Performers like Ed Sheeran and KT Tunstall helped bring looping back to our attention.

Of course, acoustic amplification starts with a guitar pickup, the focus of a lot of imagination and energy over the past decades. Many brands now default to including a pickup, but guitarists also have a wide range of aftermarket

systems to choose from. In an effort to better capture the complex tone of the acoustic guitar, systems that incorporate more than one pickup have become more common, including the L.R. Baggs Anthem, Fishman PowerTap, and Seymour Duncan Wavelength Duo. Guitar builders have also explored ways to integrate pickup systems into their guitars during the construction process. Taylor Guitar's Expression System and Maton's AP5-Pro are just a couple of examples.

Advances in digital electronics are also changing the pickup landscape. The Fishman Aura, introduced in 2004, digitally manipulates the raw pickup signal to match the unam-



plified sound of the guitar. Audio Sprockets' Tone-Dexter and L. R. Baggs' Soundscape allow musicians to leverage these techniques themselves to match the tone of their specific instrument with any pickup they choose.

Some manufacturers are combining modeling techniques with custom integrated pickup systems. For example, Fender's American Acoustasonic instruments can function as electric guitars, but also use digital processing to produce acoustic sounds from the same instrument. Martin incorporates the Aura system into many of its guitars, while Yamaha's SRT (Studio Response Technology) system leverages their proprietary pickups with digital signal modeling technology.

### IN THE POCKET

It's easy to take accessories for granted, but picks, straps, tuners, metronomes, strings, string

winders and many accessories that play an important role in making music have evolved as well over the past few decades.

Electronic tuners have existed in some form since the 1930s, but early models were bulky and expensive. Chromatic tuners in stompbox form, like the Boss TU-2, began to appear in the late 1990s. More recently, clip-on headstock tuners—often so small they are nearly invisible—have gained in popularity. With the widespread adoption of the smartphone, there are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of app-based tuners, offering a wide range of visualization approaches. Another recent development is TC Electronic's Polytune, introduced in 2010, which displays the tuning of all six strings as you strum.

Well-known pick manufacturers like Dunlop have extended the variety of styles, materials and shapes they provide. There is also an active community of boutique pick makers, like BlueChip, Red Bear Trading Co., Wegen, and others, offering high-grade materials with options to customize shape, bevels, and more. D'Addario has also gotten in on the game with its high-end Casein picks.

Capos are a seemingly simple idea, but the number of creative solutions that exist is nearly endless. Some solutions have proven the test of time; for example, Schubb's first capo, introduced in 1979, remains popular today, and the company has continued to refine the original design, expanding the line and adding a roller mechanism in 2013. Schubb also introduced its first partial capo in 1995. The Spider Capo, a flexible approach to partial capos, appeared in 2008. Maintaining intonation when adding or removing capos is often a challenge, partly due to variations in fretboard radius. Thalia Capos address this issue by providing replaceable "fret-pads" with different curvatures, while G7th has designed adaptive capos that automatically adjust to your fretboard's curvature.

One of the biggest changes in strings over the past three decades began when Elixir introduced coated sets in 1995, promising strings that would maintain their tone longer. Since that time, most string manufacturers have added some type of coated string. Several companies offer cryogenically frozen strings, which also promise to last longer. Others have explored alternative materials and different alloys, including high-carbon steel and aluminum bronze. And in a nod to the interest in vintage tone, strings like Martin Retro Monel and D'Addario Nickel Bronze promise a return to the 1930s, when nickel was commonly used for guitar strings.

The humble guitar case is more complex than we might expect, and designs are continuing to evolve. For example, comparing 1990s cases from Taylor or Martin against today's versions,

it's evident that current cases are stronger, offer better support for your guitar, and feel more luxurious. Today's standard cases tend to be better balanced, with handles that are more comfortable than those of the past. New materials have also enabled a new generation of cases, such as Hoffee's and Calton's carbon fiber models, and Visenut's ultra-light double-walled PVC designs.

### MOBILE DEVICES

The explosion over the past decade of mobile devices has touched almost every aspect of our lives, and acoustic guitar is no exception. You can now use phones and tablets to play backing tracks, display lyrics and chord charts, record, and control the mix on sound systems. Some sound setups even allow each individual musician to tailor their own personal mix using their phones. There are nearly endless apps available that turn our devices into tuners, metronomes, ear trainers, and drum machines. Guitar amps and effects pedals can be programmed by phone, or you can simply use your phone as your amplification chain, playing through a virtual pedal board and amplifier on the device.

Of course, smartphones have also transformed the concert experience. Where once, recording devices were banned from nearly all performances, today's concert photos show a sea of audience members holding up their phones. Bands often encourage their fans to shoot and share videos on social media. Especially during the coronavirus lockdown, mobile phones are the musician's portal to connect with an audience online, as they stream music to Facebook or YouTube. We are only at the beginning of what is possible now that everyone has a powerful computer in their pocket.

Even the humble mic stand has been impacted by mobile devices, with manufacturers turning out attachments and accessories to support mounting phones and tablets for easy access during performances.

### BACK TO THE FUTURE

The saying—variously attributed to everyone from Yogi Berra to Mark Twain—goes, "It is difficult to make predictions, especially about the future." While we can't be sure what the next 30 years have in store for the acoustic guitar, it seems safe to predict that the instrument will continue to improve and evolve to meet the demands of future musicians—and, most of all, play an important role in making music. Guitarists and makers will continue to draw inspiration from the great instruments of the past while leveraging new technology and new ideas to push forward both the music and the instruments that make it possible. **AC**



# 1930 Martin 000-45 Deluxe

**A rare and opulent offering with a magical voice**

**BY ERIC SCHOENBERG**

**T**his beautiful, unique instrument is possibly the finest example of the early period of the American guitar. The 000-45 Deluxe and its sister guitar, the OM-45 Deluxe, symbolize a turning point from the early to the modern period. The early period was the age of 12-fret guitars, with wide necks, slotted pegheads, and long bodies with only 12 frets clear of the body. These guitars gave way to models with solid pegheads and narrower necks, instruments whose shoulders were shortened to allow 14 frets clear of the body.

The instrument shown here is a custom-ordered 000-45 made in 1930. It was called a 000-45 Special in Martin's records and is the first known use of what would later be called the deluxe trim: a fancy inlaid pickguard, abalone snowflakes on the bridge, and gold-plated, engraved tuning machines with mother-of-pearl buttons. The most opulent model to show up in the Martin catalogue (as opposed to being custom-ordered) is the OM-45 Deluxe. Only 14 were recorded to have been made, all in 1930. When this 000-45 Special, a hitherto unknown guitar, showed up a year ago, it became clear from the serial number (which dated it as older than all of the other Deluxes) that it was the 15th Deluxe, the de facto prototype for the OM model. Note the slotted peghead with tuner buttons extending backwards. When Martin switched to the now standard solid peghead with buttons sticking out to the sides, it looked odd to the public. To resolve this problem, Martin initially used banjo tuners on the OM model, which proved to be impractical because of their low tuning ratio and their difficulty with the guitar's thicker bass strings.

There is something magical about the sound of this instrument: deep, warm, fat, clear, bright, and full. The 12-fret Martins seem to be throatier than their 14-fret counterparts, and the OM's in particular display a remarkably clear, musical treble.

**AC**

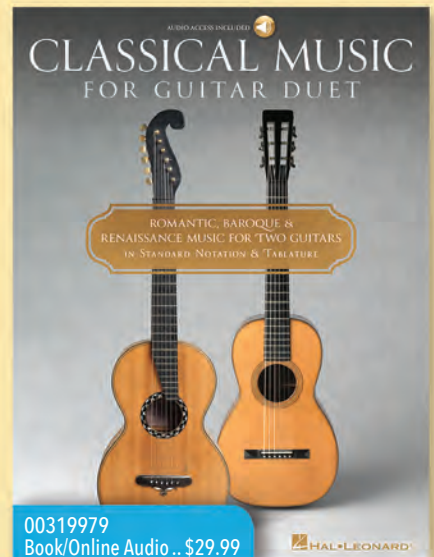
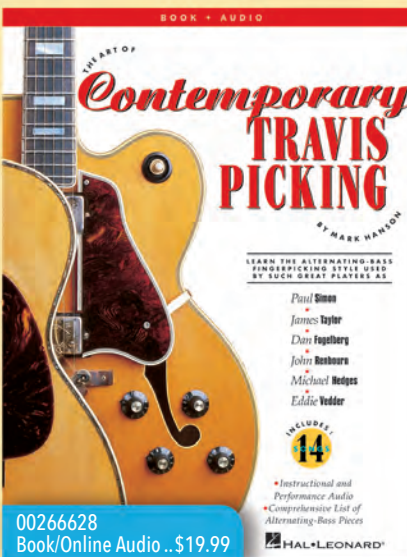
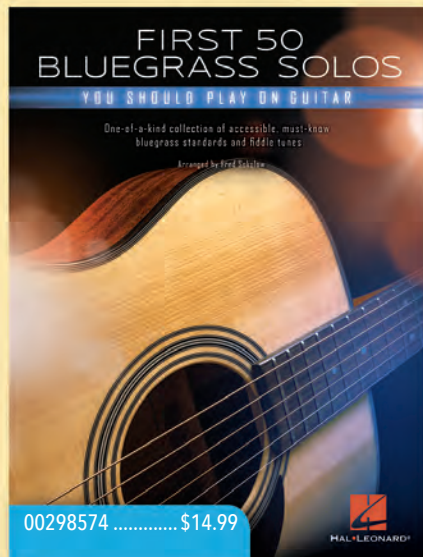
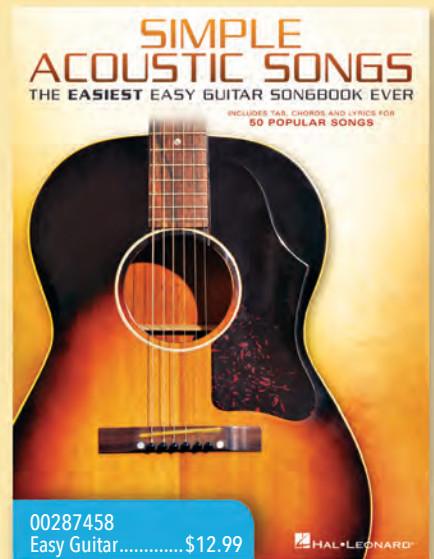
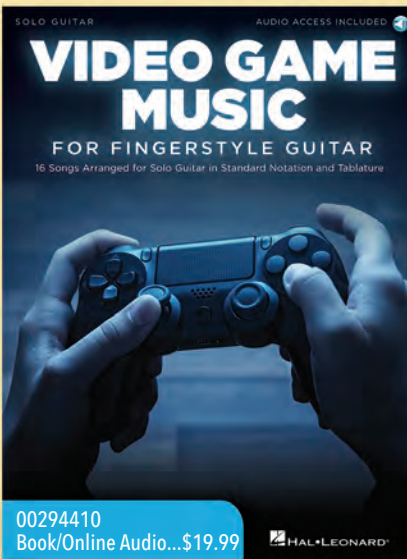
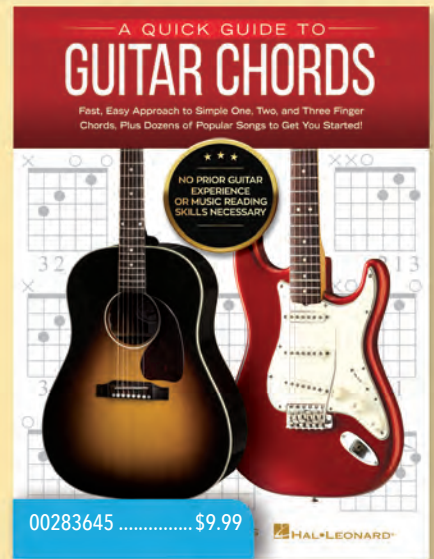
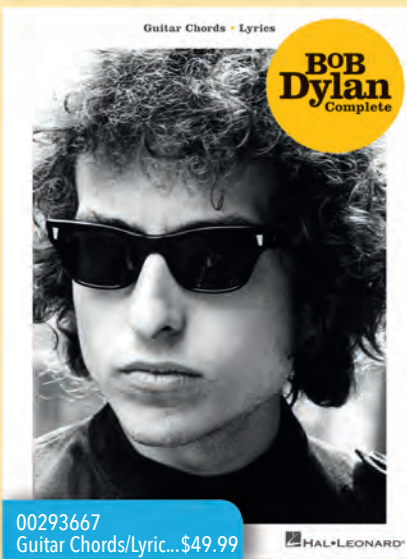
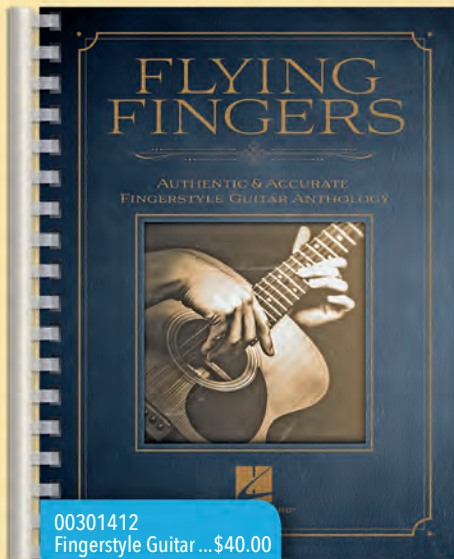


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September 1998 issue  
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